

The Gran Teatre del Liceu in Catalan Culture:

History, Representation and Myth

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

This thesis examines the position of Barcelona's Gran Teatre del Liceu within Barcelona's cultural landscape as a means of exploring its modern-day role as one of Europe's most important opera houses. Other studies of the Liceu have provided extensive historical narratives, but have rarely considered any kind of sociological or cultural theory when analysing the theatre's role in the city.

Chapter 1 explores the Liceu in Spanish and Catalan literature and dramaturgy and questions its role as a representative of upper-class Barcelona culture, and the changes this role has undergone over the course of Spain's transition to democracy.

The Liceu's location in the adjacent Raval district is examined in Chapter 2: the area has undergone considerable physical and demographic changes over the last decades, and the opera house's relationship to this area and the larger Barcelona context is discussed in some detail.

The third chapter contextualises the Liceu within the wider Catalan cultural panorama and examines the impact of the recession in Spain, which has greatly affected cultural spending, and consequently the theatre's programme. This problem has been aggravated by an awkward, opaque system of management; the thesis provides examples and analysis of the difficulties the theatre experienced between 2010 and 2013.

The final chapter seeks to underline the efforts of the artistic direction to make the Liceu a referent of modern European operatic productions, with three case studies of stagings that represent modern interpretations of opera by contemporary Catalan directors. These works have been chosen as representative of the Liceu's determined modernisation of the operatic spectacle and of its commitment to local artists.

The thesis aims to present a more critical view of Barcelona's opera house that goes beyond chronological narrative and anecdote in depicting the modern-day situation of the institution and its place in the Barcelona context.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This doctorate was funded by an Arts and Humanities Research Council Collaborative Doctoral Award with the Gran Teatre del Liceu and I am grateful to the AHRC for their support of this project.

I would also like to thank my supervisors, Maria Delgado, for her tireless efforts, gracious patience and endless enthusiasm, and Jordi Larios, for his excellent humour and wisdom. I would like to give special thanks to my colleague Anna Wilson for her constant sympathy, company and encouragement over the last few years. I would also like to thank the staff of Queen Mary, University of London for their help and support during this project over the last four years.

I would also like to thank the Gran Teatre del Liceu and Joan Matabosch for their help and assistance during the research period in Barcelona.

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INTRODUCTION

The Gran Teatre del Liceu is currently the subject of two exhibitions in Barcelona which look back over the institution's illustrious history as a focal point for city society and its importance as a manifestation of European cultural mores in Catalonia and in Spain.

As part of the Wagner Bicentenary celebrations and the 100th anniversary of the Institut del Teatre, the National Art Museum of Catalonia is staging an exhibition on twelve canvasses painted by the Catalan artist Adrià Gual for the Wagnerian Association in 1904 that were discovered recently in the Biblioteca de Catalunya's collection;¹ Gual's exposure to the music and the cultural theories of the German composer arguably influences his later output as a *modernista* artist par excellence.² The twelve panels created for *Parsifal* and *Tristan and Isolde* display an absorption of the Wagnerian interpretation of modernism as expressed by other early twentieth-century Catalan artists, such as Josep Clarà, Josep Maria Sert, Feliu Elias and Joaquim Torres-Garcia, among others. The Amics del Liceu have staged an exhibition in Barcelona's Palau Robert entitled 'L'Òpera, una reflexió. Amics del Liceu 25 anys' that covers the 25 years of the Liceu's history, including testimonials and reflections from musicologists, writers and other intellectuals. The Amics del Liceu is an important part of the theatre's outreach programme in that it is devoted to spreading opera as a relevant art form by organising colloquiums and showings of important operatic productions from around

¹ Generalitat de Catalunya, 'El Departament de Cultura presenta l'exposició "Richard Wagner i Adrià Gual. Els plafons perduts de l'Associació Wagneriana'. Presentation of Adrià Gual's panels for Wagner's works on the Generalitat's website.

<<http://www20.gencat.cat/portal/site/CulturaDepartament/menuitem.4f810f50a62de38a5a2a63a7b0c0e1a0/?vgnextoid=667cd2981746f110VgnVCM1000008d0c1e0aRCRD&vgnnextchannel=667cd2981746f110VgnVCM1000008d0c1e0aRCRD&vgnnextfnt=detall&contentid=aa6366a3606ce310VgnVCM2000009b0c1e0aRCRD>>, 21 May 2013
[accessed 1 June 2013]

² Lourdes Jiménez, Presentation for the Associació Wagneriana's exhibition on Adrià Gual's painted panels. 'Richard Wagner y Adrià Gual. Los paneles perdidos de la Asociación Wagneriana'. <<http://www.bicentenariwagner.cat/es/exposicions-1/richard-wagner-i-adria-gual-els-plafons-perduts-de-lassociacio-wagneriana/>> [accessed 1 June 2013]

the world, as well as dramatic readings and publication of opera texts. Since 2005, the Amics have organised both the tours of the theatre and various programmes to attract a younger audience to the theatre, such as opera workshops for teenagers in the Raval, the area surrounding the Liceu, and the Opera programme offered at the University of Barcelona. Complementary to this, they are responsible for the reduced price subscriptions for young people and organise vocal composition competitions in collaboration with the Jesús Serra Foundation. In addition, they have taken on the mantle of the programme of the Wagner Bicentenary.³ Similarly, the Amics del Liceu is also in charge of the publication of a seasonal book which brings together reflections on each operatic season and commissions artists to create work based on the season's programming; these reflections from various figures from cultural and political backgrounds such as Terenci Moix, Mario Vargas Llosa, Félix de Azúa, Carmen Calvo and Boris Izaguirre make up the centre of this collection of testimonials.

These two exhibitions devoted to Barcelona's opera house come at a time of important changes in the Liceu's history. Long a home for the city's cultural élite, the theatre has become a key reference point in Barcelona's cultural landscape, and the theatre's ambitious programme aims to rank the Liceu amongst the most renowned opera houses in Europe, as a destination theatre with a world-class programme that combines vocal excellence with the showcasing of Barcelona's not insignificant theatre scene. Since the theatre's creation out of the Gran Liceo de Montesión vocal association

³ Generalitat de Catalunya, 'Amics del Liceu, 25 anys en la difusió de l'òpera'. < <http://www20.gencat.cat/portal/site/CulturaDepartament/menuitem.4f810f50a62de38a5a2a63a7b0c0e1a0/?vgnextoid=667cd2981746f110VgnVCM1000008d0c1e0aRCRD&vgnnextchannel=667cd2981746f110VgnVCM1000008d0c1e0aRCRD&vgnnextfmt=detall&contentid=http://www20.gencat.cat/portal/site/PalauRobert/menuitem.24624ed9d70d41f972623b10b0c0e1a0/?vgnextoid=7ed2a82285092110VgnVCM1000000b0c1e0aRCRD&vgnnextchannel=7ed2a82285092110VgnVCM1000000b0c1e0aRCRD&vgnnextfmt=detall&contentid=127dd4337ab5e310VgnVCM2000009b0c1e0aRCRD>>, 28 April 2013 [accessed 1 June 2013].

in the 1840s, the Gran Teatre del Liceu has striven to attract and present some of the most highly regarded voices in opera to its stage as part of a concerted programme to make Barcelona a world capital of opera, to stand amongst the prestigious theatres of the Opéra Garnier, La Scala and Covent Garden.

Closer to the modern day, Barcelona is a city that, at the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century, is in a precarious state: the difficulties of Spain's recession are a constant in the world's press, as are the accusations of political corruption and internal fighting. The stasis of the national and regional governments in dealing with the financial problems of Europe's fourth-largest economy effectively have led to uncertainty in social, health and cultural policies as Spain attempts to adhere to the stringent limits imposed by international financial institutions in return for help packages whose effectiveness is unproved.

Given the difficult financial situation of Catalonia (a part of Spain which sees itself as a net contributor to the Spanish economy, with precious little return from its tax contributions⁴), the region is in the midst of starting their own sovereign process, designed to wrest financial (and political) control from Madrid, with various potential outcomes, from greater autonomy to outright independence from Spain. In addition to considering itself sufficiently culturally different (the so-called *fet diferencial* that set Catalans apart from other Spaniards – who are grouped together despite the many regional movements like the Basques, Andalusians and Galicians) to merit its own state, Catalonia (and especially Barcelona) considers itself the door to Spain in terms of influences; Catalonia as a region seems to consider itself more 'European' than Spanish (with the attendant problematics of the concept of 'European'), choosing to take its cue

⁴ Anon., 'El dèficit fiscal català s'enquista en el 8,5%', *El Periódico*, 22 May 2013, p. 17.

from what it considers its more urbane neighbours to the North of Europe, rather than from the rest of the Iberian Peninsula. This concept has a long pedigree and choice examples that 'reflect' this opinion: the fact that Spain's first railway was from Barcelona to the seaside town of Mataró, towards France, not Madrid, is a popular anecdote to prove Catalonia's non-Castilian-ness and the region's function as Europe's gateway to Spain and vice versa.

Evidence for Catalonia's claim for cultural and financial autonomy can be seen in the complex cultural space of its capital Barcelona, which has had volumes published on the difficulties and eccentricities of two related but distinct cultures and languages – Joan Ramon Resina's *Barcelona's Vocation of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), Kathryn Crameri's *Catalonia: National Identity and Cultural Policy 1980-2003* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), Lourdes Orozco's *Teatro en Barcelona: 1980-2000* (Madrid, Asociación de los Directores de Escena, 2007), Sharon Feldman's *In The Eye of The Storm: Contemporary Theater in Barcelona* (Lewisberg: Bucknell University Press, 2009) all explore the complexities, both social and political, of the (re-)creation of a nation-state in the post-Franco era within the context of a larger nation-building project. All have their own particular perspective on the situation and approach the question from varying political and linguistic viewpoints and taken together provide a good overview to the situation of culture in Barcelona from the late 1980s, from the process of the politicisation of culture since the beginning of the rule of Convergència i Unió (the conservative party that has been in power for the majority of post-Franco Catalan autonomous government, usually referred to by the acronym CiU), to the pre-recession state of affairs in the city: *Barcelona's Vocation of Modernity* was published in 2008, at the apogee of cultural investment before the stringent budget cuts that took hold seriously affected cultural output in the city. Nevertheless, the Liceu

tends to get relatively short shrift in this kind of city-wide publications: although frequently recognised as an important institution in the city, the opera house is arguably considered of little interest given that it is not as much a part of the overt politicisation of culture that has taken place over the last 35 years of autonomous government in Catalonia. Since the Liceu has its own idiosyncratic system of management that reflects the structure from its days as a private institution, with the organs of democratic government represented on committees that also retain members of the previous board of owners, it does not necessarily reflect a political viewpoint in the same way as the other large, 'national' theatres such as the Teatre Lliure (Free Theatre) and the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya (TNC, National Theatre of Catalonia). The binary of these theatres and their political context will be dealt with later in the thesis (see pp. 123-127) as they provide an idea of how the various levels of government in Barcelona express their own agendas and how the Liceu fits in (or not) with this situation.

The Generalitat de Catalunya (regional government) has a considerable amount of control over many aspects of Catalan life, such as education, transport, culture, but not over finance – a particularly problematic issue for many Catalans. Nevertheless, since the restoration of democracy with the ratification of the Spanish Constitution in 1978, the Generalitat has prioritised bilingualism as perhaps the most important cultural and social issue since the former was granted exclusive educational powers as a unifying element of both native Catalans, 'xarnegos' (immigrants from other parts of Spain, notably the regions of Andalusia and Extremadura, in the 1960s and 1970s) and international immigrants from China and Pakistan, amongst others.⁵ Despite repeated

⁵ Article 131 of the Catalan Statute of Autonomy. <http://www.gencat.cat/generalitat/cas/estatut/titol_4.htm#a131> [accessed 24 July 2013]

political challenges to this policy, the use of Catalan as a vehicular language in school has improved awareness and use of Catalan in the everyday sphere. The success of this linguistic policy, as might be expected, is highly subjective, and the topic itself is emotive and used by all parties of the political spectrum as a weapon to defend or denounce, as suits. The city is largely bilingual,⁶ with all the complications that two co-existing linguistically-related (and politically charged) languages bring. However, the metropolitan area of Barcelona has varying degrees of use of Catalan and Spanish that respond to historical, cultural, political and wealth criteria that are too complex to be described here. With this in mind, the Generalitat de Catalunya, as the region's government, officially conducts its business in Catalan, and as such, many of sections over which it has power have a noticeably Catalan-language bent which is especially visible in the departments of Education and Culture. The discussion of the appropriateness and success of this linguistic project is beyond the remit of this thesis, but it does have consequences in that the Liceu, the topic of this thesis, is a proudly bilingual, if not multilingual institution where the language used amongst the staff is the vernacular Catalan but by no means to the exclusion of Spanish, but where English is spoken by and large as the lingua franca of performers and staff alike in line with the theatre's intended international projection.

Despite the Liceu's status as one of the most prestigious theatre spaces in Spain, there has been little consideration of its function in the modern day: those volumes dedicated to the theatre that do exist are by and largely appreciative narratives chronicling rather than examining the history, politics and programming of the Liceu.

⁶ In 2001, Idescat, the Catalan statistics agency notes that of a possible population of 1,466,763 only 71,547 did not understand the Catalan language, and that 1,094,124 were able to speak it. <<http://www.idescat.cat/territ/BasicTerr?TC=5&V0=1&V1=08019&V3=876&V4=17&ALLINFO=TRUE&PARENT=1&CTX=B>> [accessed 25 July 2013].

Examples such as Roger Alier's *El gran llibre del Liceu* (Barcelona: Carroggio, 1999) and Joaquim Iborra's *La mirada del conserge: El dietari del Gran Teatre del Liceu* (Barcelona: Societat del Gran Teatre del Liceu, 1999) are works dedicated to the Liceu and provide exhaustive lists of memorable performances and other events at the theatre, but rarely investigate or even consider the theatre's function as a primary theatre within Barcelona. In a technical field, the book *L'arquitectura del Liceu. Barcelona's Opera House* (Barcelona: Edicions de la Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, 2000) produced by Ignasi Solà-Morales, Xavier Fabré and Lluís Dilmé shortly after the theatre's reopening, published by the Polytechnic University of Catalonia is an excellent reference point for the technical details of the refurbishment of the theatre. It lists important events in the history of the theatre and has a comprehensive detailing of the refurbishment and the technical components thereof, down to detailed acoustics listings, floor plans and water table measurements.

Even within the area of cultural management, the Liceu has been overlooked by professionals: a detailed 2004 study of cultural institutions in the Catalan capital commissioned by the Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona (CCCB, Barcelona Centre for Contemporary Culture) which investigated the effectiveness of the cultural planning of the previous 30 years in the city provided exhaustive attendance figures for theatres and productions. These included small performance spaces such as La Seca/Espai Brossa and Cafè-Teatre Llantíol but omitted the Liceu except for a brief geographical reference within the context of the Raval.⁷ That such a major theatre in the city should be reduced to a mere reference by an otherwise comprehensive cultural study of the city's cultural history and present seems to be an indication that the Liceu is

⁷ Joan Subirats and Joaquim Rius, *Del Xino al Raval: Cultura i transformació a la Barcelona central* (Barcelona: Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, 2004).
<http://www.cccb.org/rca_gene/raval.pdf> [accessed 25 July 2013], p. 25.

considered to operate beyond the scope of other theatres. The study seems to not consider the Liceu as a part of the conventional scene, but rather is in the same condition as the Auditori and the Palau de la Música as venues for concerts and music, rather than theatre per se. This rather arbitrary separation of theatre and music in the context of the Liceu seems to reinforce an idea that despite the work of Artistic Director Joan Matabosch (Barcelona, 1961) to ensure the venue become a more inclusive venue since its reopening, it is still considered something of an élite institution for more refined tastes and classical music. Indeed, the CCCB study draws a contrast between the associations of the Liceu and the poverty of the surrounding area.⁸

As such, there has not been a study that looks at the Liceu in a global sense, beyond the historical and technical, as a cultural icon in a city whose economy depends on culture as a means of earning both artistic and financial weight within its own country and in Europe as a whole. The current economic context of the late 2000s and early 2010s in Spain has meant that the intangible value of culture, even in a city whose financial health and international reputation is built to a large extent on the cultural economy, has had to continuously justify itself in terms of visitor numbers and value for money. Previously, the late 1990s and 2000s saw a large increase in the amount of funding accorded to the Spanish Ministry of Culture as the country enjoyed economic growth powered by construction and easy lending,⁹ and was able to afford to invest in cultural buildings inspired by the success of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, whose success in placing the Basque on the map as a cultural pilgrimage point is well-known.

⁸ Joan Subirats and Joaquim Rius, *Del Xino al Raval: Cultura i transformació a la Barcelona central*, p. 25.

⁹ The Spanish state budget for culture (not including the culture budgets of the autonomous regions or local administration levels) rose from €560m in 2000 to reach a peak of €1,135m in 2011, before shrinking slightly to €1,051m this 2012. The autonomous budgets rose over the same period from €952m to a peak of €2,129m in 2010, reducing to €1,769 in 2012. Gobierno de España, *Anuario de estadísticas culturales 2012*, p. 29. <<http://www.mcu.es/estadisticas/MC/NAEC/index.html>> [accessed 25 July 2013]

The growth of the perceived power of culture to attract investment and to create wealth has been a trend in the last decades in Europe with the creation of the cultural economy, but has been approached in a different way in Spain. Much of the success of the Guggenheim Bilbao was due to the combination of Frank Gehry's spectacular architecture (which in itself became a reason to visit the museum) and the reputation of a major museum collection. Given this potent, almost immediately successful template, subsequently cultural installations were built all over Spain that attempted to recreate this success, often in places where there was neither the local demand nor causal link for such installations, or indeed a local economy capable of sustaining the facilities. This is the case with the Oscar Niemeyer Foundation in Avilés, an industrial city in Asturias which appears to bear little relation to the centenarian Brazilian architect other than wishing to appropriate his name for the sake of cultural tourism.¹⁰ This oversupply of cultural amenities in Spain is mirrored in the now-infamous infrastructure boom: almost every provincial capital aspires to have an airport or high-speed train station which appears to have little function other than to funnel resources and wealth to the capital in a game of regional competition. The upshot of this over-expenditure is bankrupt town councils and over-sized, under-used facilities such as the airports in Castellón and Ciudad Real, various high-speed train stations sited more to suit political will than actual paying customers and unfinished cultural facilities like the Cidade de Cultura de Galicia in Santiago de Compostela.¹¹ In the context of the increasing international pressure on Spain to keep its spiralling debt and unemployment in check

¹⁰ The lack of financial viability of such a complex in a small post-industrial city meant that the centre closed in 2011 after the regional elections in Asturias, only to be reopened in 2013 after a Facebook and Twitter campaign.

¹¹ Anon., 'Feijóo anuncia la paralización definitiva de la Ciudad de Cultura en Santiago', *RTVE*, 27 March 2013. <<http://www.rtve.es/noticias/20130327/fejoo-anuncia-paralizacion-definitiva-ciudad-cultura/625680.shtml>> [accessed 25 July 2013]

(which is projected to reach 27.8% in 2014),¹² these unfinished, underused monuments to provincial and political extravagance are an embarrassing reminder of the financial profligacy of the 1990s and 2000s.

Despite a large economy and a population of around 4.7 million people in the metropolitan area,¹³ Barcelona has not been immune to this over-dependence on cultural economy, and indeed since 1975, Catalan and Barcelona culture have both been used by the respective levels of government as a way to 're-catalanise' the population in the years of the post-Franco transition as a marker of the so-called *fet diferencial* as a way to differentiate Catalans and Spaniards in their construction of separate identities. As such, the Catalan Departments of Culture and Education enjoyed generous funding in the period of the construction of the autonomous governments in the late 1970s and 1980s in order to propagate this idea. Catalan-language schooling at all levels of education from nursery to university has created a generation of successfully bilingual Catalans who interact with culture in both languages. Cultural installations present a largely Catalan-language face to the world in the revindication of Catalan as a relevant, essential part of the city's young, modern, but increasingly international culture. After the successful Olympic Games and thanks to the boom in the affordable European short-haul holiday market, Barcelona has built a reputation as a young, vibrant, European city that is open to external influences but still promotes Catalan as an important part of this exported culture.

¹² Anon., 'La OCDE prevé que el paro subirá en España hasta el 27,8% a finales de 2014', *La Vanguardia*, 16 July 2013. < <http://www.lavanguardia.com/economia/20130716/54377576218/la-ocde-preve-que-el-paro-subira-en-espana-hasta-el-27-8.html> > [accessed 15 August 2013]

¹³ Estimate of Barcelona metropolitan area population, December 2011, IDESCAT. <<http://www.idescat.cat/territ/BasicTerr?TC=5&V0=4&V3=362&V4=284&ALLINFO=TRUE&PARENT=1&CTX=B&V1=1&VOK=Confirmar>> [accessed 15 August 2013]

Within this context of the growth of the cultural economy, institutions such as the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya and the Teatre Lliure do not appear to hanker after the same kind of international name recognition as museums such as the CCCB in line with their ambitions as ‘national’ institutions. Their remit seems to be largely confined to an educated metropolitan audience,¹⁴ somewhat in contrast to the Liceu’s ambition to construct a solid, positive international reputation as a European-class, if not world-class member of a select group of quality opera houses, marked by their commitment to excellence and internationalism in their productions.

The role of the Liceu in the city is very closely tied to its origins as a privately-funded theatre for the bourgeoisie, who had grown rich through the careful saving and investment of the Catalan entrepreneurs of the 19th century whose savvy had made the area the richest in Spain, as testified by the luxurious industrial, domestic and civic architecture, such as the *modernista* palaces and factories seen around Catalonia. As an assembly of the great and good of Catalonia’s wealthy who owned *lloges* (boxes) at the theatre and bore deeds to this effect, the Liceu became an essential part of upper-class life in the city as it acquired the function of a salon: trade, courtships and strategic alliances were forged in the boxes between the families and business partners. Indeed, the first chapter of the thesis, ‘The Gran Teatre del Liceu: A Cultural Survey’ looks at the appearance of the opera house in Catalan literature and theatre as something of a cultural marker as to the importance of the theatre in Catalan culture as a whole beyond the merely performative or theatrical. The chapter examines the appearances of the Liceu in a choice of various Barcelona-centred works, including Narcís Oller’s *La febre d’or* (The Gold Rush), a story that narrates the fortunes of a family that becomes rich in

¹⁴ It is worth noting that in recent seasons, the TNC has been staging more popular shows to attract more visitors from the provincial cities to be more inclusive.

the boom of the 1870s and 1880s in Barcelona and whose access to the Liceu becomes a marker of their social and financial ascent. This is complemented by the vision of early tourists in the 1860s and the view from the upper floors in the writings of Josep Pla. In the modern day the Liceu reappears as a cryptic background to Barcelona playwright Lluïsa Cunillé's disconcerting drama *Barcelona, mapa d'ombres* (Barcelona, Map of Shadows) which explores the drama and trivia of human relationships in the city behind closed doors, far from the projected image of the city. Cunillé's work is frequently morally ambiguous, and this play is no exception: in fact, the 1994 fire at the opera house is used by Cunillé as a trigger for a series of events that change the characters' lives and cause them to reveal some long-held secrets and re-calibrate their interrelationships to each other and to the city as a whole.

'The Liceu and the Raval: Historical Location and Cultural Landmark' and 'The Liceu and the Raval: Urban Regeneration, Reconstruction and Political Theatres' are two chapters that are closely linked, which move on from the human element of interaction with the theatre to investigate the location of the Liceu within the city of Barcelona, looking at the physical interaction it has with its surroundings: the opera house is sited on Barcelona's most famous street, La Rambla, in the middle of the historic city centre, but is also part of one of the city's most multicultural, poor and arguably dynamic parts of the city, the Raval. The chapter looks at how each area has been configured according to medieval street plans and the subsequent changes in the city's topography, how the theatre benefits from its position on one of the city's central arteries and the extent to which it fits in with the surrounding area of the Raval. This part of Barcelona has a reputation as a poor, seedy area that is slowly being gentrified both by the influx of alternative artists attracted by the cheap rents and the intervention of the government in the form of cultural installations as a means of promoting the continued

transformation of the area. In this way, the Raval follows the traditional pattern of areas of theatres being built beyond the central nucleus of a city in a kind of 'service quarter' where unpleasant and morally dubious buildings for entertainment could be found. As previously mentioned, this contrasts with the establishment of an opera house and theatre for the wealthy of Barcelona in the form of a salon to encounter, meet and do business.

At this point, it is worth mentioning the Liceu's main rival in the operatic prestige stakes within Spain: Madrid's Teatro Real. As a theatre founded by royal commission in the early 19th century (as opposed to the Liceu's beginning in civil society), the Real cultivates a reputation as the apex of opera culture in Spain and, given its status as a theatre in the capital, has avoided the radical cuts suffered by the Liceu, potentially through its status as the principal theatre of the Spanish capital, and receives large amounts of funding from the state, the city itself and the regional Comunidad de Madrid government. Furthermore, the theatre seems to have been quicker to reduce its dependence on government funding by instigating a sponsorship programme that appears to have succeeded in attracting revenue; in contrast to the relative disarray the Liceu found itself in with the announcement of an *Expediente de Regulación de Empleo* in 2012 (Employment Regulation Measure; a move to temporarily close a business as a last-ditch measure to save money and to theoretically ensure the ongoing functioning of the institution), the Real seems to be relatively secure in its sources of funding.

Cultural policies in Barcelona and the financing thereof are a key part of the thesis's fourth chapter "'El Liceu de tots": Management, Programming and Politics', which investigates the Liceu within the framework of culture in late 20th and early 21st Catalonia and Spain. More specifically, the chapter looks at the measures the theatre has taken to cope with the difficulties and unpredictability of recession financing which has

become an unfortunately normal part of cultural life in the city. These difficulties are compounded by the unusual way in which the Liceu is governed – representatives from various levels of government as well as the extraneous committees of former owners and other interest groups form the board of the theatre who answer to an executive director chosen on a political basis from the current ruling party's faithfuls. This necessarily has a serious effect on the management of the institution, and the chapter details the various influences at work and details some of the more remarkable effects the recession has had, such as the threat of a temporary closure of the theatre, which itself has had repercussions on the theatre's way of relating to the public.

This thesis attempts to look at the degree to which the Liceu is an integrated part of Barcelona culture, and the extent to which this is down to artistic director Joan Matabosch (at the Liceu from 1996-2013) and whether he has succeeded in combining a forward-looking remit with a reflection of local culture in the context of city that considers itself culturally avant-garde, all the while subject to a relatively limiting cultural policy that requires bilingualism and the creation of a specifically Barcelona culture. Matabosch's programme and the success of the Liceu in promoting and showcasing this kind of vernacular content is the theme of the fifth chapter of the thesis, 'Producing Barcelona: Calixto Bieito's *Carmen* (2010), La Fura dels Baus's *Le Grand Macabre* (2011) and Carol López's *Cosí FUN Tutte* (2013)', and explores some significant productions of recent years featuring Barcelona-based producers. All three are artists closely linked to Barcelona either by birth or association and in the case of the first two often 'represent' Barcelona and Catalan culture beyond its borders in international theatre festivals. Thus, the significance of these operas lies in the Liceu's aforementioned localized remit to bring directors, producers and performance artists to the opera house to foster and showcase local talent as a part of the city's ongoing

culturally ambitious plans to be at the forefront of the European theatre trends. The three works chosen for investigation are director Calixto Bieito's production of Bizet's *Carmen* (2010), Catalan theatre troupe La Fura dels Baus's imagining of Hungarian György Ligeti's *Le Grand Macabre* (2011) and Barcelona dramatist and director Carol López's version of Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, reimagined for a younger audience with the title *Così FUN Tutte* (2012). López is one of Catalonia's most commercially successful playwrights and to a certain extent represents the future of theatre-making in the city with her youth-oriented, bilingual and knowing plays.

Bieito's *Carmen* was initially performed at the Festival de Peralada in 2001, and was restaged with minor adjustments to open the 2010 season. Bizet's story is brought to an anonymous Spanish border town and depicts the story of a lubricious Carmen in seedy, militarised surroundings, where she lives by her wits and sexuality. Bieito's staging is bathed in 1970s stylings and overbearing bull-fighting imagery as a metaphor for the heavily macho ambience of the bordertown world that Carmen inhabits. In contrast to the more controversial of Bieito's stagings of other operas, such as his now-infamous production of *Un ballo in maschera*, *Carmen* is a finely-judged exercise in the threatening presence of violence in Carmen's universe which celebrates the protagonist and contextualises her behaviour, all the while avoiding the folkloric clichés of 'more traditional' performances of Bizet's oft-produced opera.

Following the vein of malaise and background of institutional violence suggested by Bieito's *Carmen*, La Fura dels Baus's production of Ligeti's *Le Grand Macabre* was a production that embraced illness, corruption and death as an inevitable farce that was intrinsically woven into the fabric of day-to-day existence. The choice of the Hungarian

composers so-called 'anti-anti-opera'¹⁵ which embraces opera in all its extravagance and formal complexity and then subverts its tradition structure to create a work that revels in de-constructing and re-constructing the clichés of modern operas. Instead of traditional themes of romance and love, Ligeti wrote an opera about ill health, decadence and decay. The presence of an enormous, sickly doll named Claudia placed in an unflattering, slightly queasy position on the stage worked as a metaphor for the current woes of the country, and the multifarious outlandish characters that made their living on her decrepit flesh celebrated their own lives despite the decadence of their home, singing obscene songs that dealt with death and demise in a cheerful manner. The black humour and resolution of the characters to survive in the face of imminent death was not lost on the Spanish reviewers, who applauded the oddly positivist resolution of the morbid work.

Finally, *Cosí FUN Tutte* by Carol López provides an insight into the work of one of Catalonia's highest-profile producers of the 2000s and 2010s: having started out as a regular feature at the Teatre Villaroel in Barcelona, where she later took over from Javier Daulte as artistic director in 2010, director Carol López turned her hand to adapting Mozart's comedy of errors in 2012 for the Petit Lliceu, the Lliceu's outreach programme for children, using a local cast and a reduced set-list in a production aimed at interesting younger viewers in opera and presenting it in an easily-understandable, appropriately-localised format. Although initially intended as a full-scale 'adult' production, López's pregnancy intervened and the production was postponed and reduced in format to a Petit Lliceu production. Nevertheless, Carol López imbues the

¹⁵ Richard Steinitz, *György Ligeti: Music of the Imagination* (Lebanon, NE: Northeastern University Press, 2003), p. 220.

staging with the modern approach that she uses in her work at the Villarroel and gives a useful insight into how the full-scale production could have been.

To conclude, this thesis seeks to investigate how the role of the Liceu has changed from its inception as a mid-19th century institution to a modern 21st century theatre and what this has meant in terms of how the building responds to its physical surroundings as well as how it has adapted to changes in the attendant demographic through innovative, inclusive programming. The theatre passes from having people quite literally investing in the theatre at its beginnings to an unprecedented crisis in the post-Franco era which led to the theatre earning a reputation of being the domain of a Francoist 'elite' that was at odds with newly-democratic Spain's more populist pretensions.¹⁶ After the 1994 fire which destroyed the building and the subsequent rebuilding from 1994 to 1999, under the direction of Joan Matabosch the Liceu enjoyed comfortable funding with a wide programme of operas until the recession started in 2008, meaning that the Liceu had to market itself more effectively to respond to a different set of economic needs to sustain itself. Moreover, the thesis takes the aforementioned examples of works from 2009 to 2012 to illustrate Matabosch's role in embracing local directors and artists and giving them a different format to work with, bringing their work to new audiences and consolidating both the theatre itself as an innovator in its field and as an established figure in the Catalan and Spanish art and music world. This thesis does not pretend to be exhaustive in its coverage of all aspects of the Liceu, but rather attempts to cover a number of the gaps left by the aforementioned studies to give a contextualised vision of the theatre and its activities in

¹⁶ Ramon Pla i Arxé, 'La formación de un gran teatro de ópera', *El Liceu: un teatre de tots?: Barcelona Metròpolis Mediterrània*, 48 (Barcelona: Ajuntament de Barcelona, 1999) p. 13.

at the beginning of the 21st century as well as giving some idea of the theatre's importance to the highly culturally-developed city Barcelona considers itself to be.

CHAPTER 1: THE GRAN TEATRE DEL LICEU: A CULTURAL SURVEY

As a physical and cultural landmark of Barcelona, the Gran Teatre del Liceu occupies an important part of the city's imaginary, both physically, with its highly visible station on La Rambla, and through its reputation within the city as a cultural reference point.

However, the Liceu's not-infrequent appearances in Spanish or Catalan literature are somewhat one-dimensional and often reduced to mere consolidation and repetition of a somewhat stereotypical vision of what the institution appears to represent within Barcelona society, creating fairly reiterative delineations of class-based clichés.

However, the institution has changed immensely since the decades that have passed since the above appearances in writing, but there is little modern literature that re-evaluates what the Liceu is to post-Transition Barcelona and Catalonia in general. The Liceu of the Franco period barely appears in literature; the prestige of the Liceu as a Catalan institution was usurped by Francoism and seemingly appropriated for the usufruct of the Spanish state, rather than its previous role as a nexus of local bourgeois culture. As such, this appropriation transformed the Liceu into a representation of the Franco élite in Barcelona. The creation of the Fundació del Gran Teatre del Liceu in the wake of the fire in 1994 could be described as an important step towards the 'democratisation' of the Liceu in the post-Franco era; as a public company, the Fundació (in conjunction with Joan Matabosch's direction) has arguably made the Liceu more relevant to the public, as I will delineate in Chapter 4, 'El Liceu de tots: Management, Programming and Politics (see p. 124).

By and large, literary portrayals of the Liceu justifiably focus on its social function in Barcelona, rather than its operatic or artistic function – like many European opera houses of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Liceu acted as a meeting point for

the upper classes and nascent bourgeoisie, with many boxes being passed on from generation to generation as a status symbol, and it is in this guise as status symbol that the Liceu most frequently appears, and as such, repeated descriptions of the privilege the Liceu represents turned it into a metonym for the upper classes, elitism and high culture – an institution underpinned by exclusivity and the concept of prestige, making it a club for the wealthy and connected; a point of reference for the bourgeoisie.

Given that for the majority of its history the Liceu has enjoyed the autonomy of being an institution funded by private money rather than being a public entity, it should perhaps not surprise that the prevailing conception of the city towards the Liceu found in literature is one of an exclusive salon for the upper echelons of society. This phenomenon was depicted by writers of the epoch that could be considered the Catalan Golden Age (1880-1920), such as Narcís Oller, who wrote in the age of the creation and rise of the Catalan bourgeoisie as one of the most powerful civic movements in Spain of the time. This vision of the Liceu as a well-to-do ghetto persists in the writing of those writers who include about the Liceu in their novels in a post-dictatorship Spain, like Eduardo Mendoza or Carlos Ruiz Zafón.

Given the slim range of works that treat the Liceu in anything more than a purely superficial mention, Edmondo de Amicis's chapter on Barcelona in his travelogue *Spagna* (1872-73), Narcís Oller's epic novel *La febre d'or* (1890-92) and playwright Lluïsa Cunillé's acclaimed 2004 play *Barcelona, mapa d'ombres* are three treatments that investigate the Liceu in some detail. In the first two instances, we find depictions of the Liceu in one of its halcyon periods. In the latter half of the 19th century, the Liceu was metonymic of Barcelona's economic success; as mentioned previously, later appearances of the Liceu in literature are frequently mere reiterations of the ostentatious prestige captured by de Amicis and Oller. In contrast, Lluïsa Cunillé's

latter-day, thoughtful treatment of the Liceu negates the visual precedence of the Liceu with a presumed knowledge of the building, and invites the viewer to reconfigure, or at least objectively evaluate their relationship to one of the most high-profile buildings in the city. All three works present the Liceu in comparison to the then contemporaneous Barcelona as well as issues that are pertinent at the time. De Amicis presents a foreigner's viewpoint, whilst Oller writes as someone who experienced the boom years of the city in the late 19th century. Cunillé, however, writes in the context of a series of plays designed to reintroduce Barcelona as a germane, autonomous theme within the city's own theatre scene. This contextualisation of the Liceu through a backdrop of the Barcelona of the time is a common occurrence in all three works.

BARCELONA: INDUSTRY AND CLASS

As the industrial capital of Spain in the latter half of the 19th century, Barcelona was the epicentre of the creation of arguably Spain's first industrial bourgeoisie; composed of a mixture of Catalan landowners and small businessmen who prudently invested their money in ventures such as the textile industry and factories such as the Vapor Vell in the Sants district and La Canadiense on Paral·lel; Spain's first railway from Barcelona to Mataró was conceived in this period, and became a symbol of Catalonia's desire to have its own Industrial Revolution. Alejandro Sánchez cites a desire for Europeanisation and modernity as a major motivational factor in the industrialisation of Barcelona and Catalonia in that they opted for 'full integration in the advanced Europe of the moment'¹⁷ to ensure the city's own pre-eminence against a background of a largely

¹⁷'La integración plena en la Europa avanzada del momento', Alejandro Sánchez Suárez, 'Manchester español, Rosa de Fuego, París del Sur', in Alejandro Sánchez Suárez, ed. *Barcelona 1888-1929; Modernidad, ambición y conflictos de una ciudad soñada* (Madrid: Alianza, 1994), 15-22 (p.15).

underdeveloped Spain (in terms of industry, education, and civil society). Indeed, the construction of the Liceu could be considered merely a part of Barcelona's programme of betting for modernity and Europeanisation; two concepts that for the purposes of discussion of 19th-century Barcelona, appear to be closely associated. As a fledgling *polis* in the 19th century, Alejandro Sánchez notes that the two cities that Barcelona most modelled itself on were Manchester for industry, and Paris for culture and Europeanisation;¹⁸ the novelty of the burgeoning condition of the city encouraged Catalan writers to attempt to capture the city in its moment of greatest development; poetry and literature flourished under the Catalan *Renaixença* (a recovery and re-birth of Catalan culture largely powered by the region's increasing wealth and the growth of the corresponding bourgeoisie) and representations of the city were one of its most important tenets.

Given Barcelona's negligible political power and autonomy relative to Madrid in the 19th century, the economic clout provided by Catalan industrialists and the local emergent bourgeoisie was the principal method by which Barcelona exerted influence in Spain. Beyond mere business, the Liceu hosted *tertúlies* (discussion groups) and provided an auditorium for influential, civic-minded members of the important families to discuss political and social issues that affected Barcelona, and by extension, Catalonia. The Liceu in this respect is then exemplary of the entrepreneurial undercurrent that is typical of Catalonia in the 19th century; the void born out of a lack of royal patronage and interest was filled by the autochthonous entrepreneurs, bourgeoisie and intelligentsia that eventually came to shape the city physically and mentally. Consequently, critic and writer Joan Ramon Resina considers the Liceu a distinctively

¹⁸ Ibid.

barceloní phenomenon in that it combines the aesthetic considerations of opera, the pragmatic necessities of business, and the political aspirations of the bourgeoisie of a second city that deemed itself superior to its *madrileño* counterpart.¹⁹ Given the imbalance of political power available to Barcelona and Catalonia relative to their economic importance to the Spanish state as a whole, the leading families of the city opted to channel the main currents of thought and power through a locally symbolic institution in order to create a forum where local interest and issues could be discussed in a kind of 'civic' court to make up for the stagnancy and inefficiency of the government in Catalonia in defending the region's interests.

That opulent society formed of second-son families, settled in a city deprived of capitality, needed the complex mechanism of a court in order to fully realise its potential. With the lack of such a thing, there was a requirement for a place whose structure would reflect the complex social ranks, where friendships could be started, business could take place, marriages could be arranged and intrigues be forged in an appropriate atmosphere, simultaneously public and secret. There one could show off newly-acquired wealth, but also disguise the backhands of fortune and attempt to reduce their scope. There illicit affairs could find their spiritual and even physical release without having to resort to a clandestine meeting or risk-taking, under the protective gaze of good Barcelona society.²⁰

¹⁹ Joan Ramon Resina, *Barcelona's Vocation of Modernity: Rise and Decline of an Urban Image* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 74.

²⁰ 'Aquella sociedad opulenta formada por familias de origen segundón, afincadas en una ciudad privada de capitalidad, necesitaba para desarrollar plenamente su potencial el complejo mecanismo de una corte o, a falta de tal cosa, de un lugar cuya estructura reflejara la compleja graduación social de sus asistentes y en cuyo ámbito pudieran entablarse amistades, celebrarse negocios, concertarse matrimonios y fraguarse intrigas en una atmósfera propicia, a la vez pública y

Arguably, this status as a 'civic' rather than 'royal' court has helped the Liceu ride out the times when the relationships between Spain and its royalty have been turbulent. Writer and journalist Roger Alier explains that during the Revolution of 1868, feeling greater loyalty to the city that founded the theatre than to benefactor Isabel II, the patrons of the Liceu summarily removed the former's statue from the building and threw it into the port.²¹

There appears to be a respect for the powerful families that did push for the construction of the theatre as part of a manifestation of Catalan identity during the *Renaixença*; writer Jaume Vicens Vives underlines their striving to put themselves at the forefront of Catalan society, contrasting their European-looking modernity with the seemingly out-of-date courtly society of Madrid:

The history of the 1800s in Catalonia is, in to a large extent, that of the associations and groups in their integration of the efforts of the bourgeoisie and intellectualism to demonstrate their presence in public life.²²

In order to understand how the Liceu came to be so closely connected to the upper and middle classes, one must examine the history, and the conception of the building. Before the construction of the Liceu, the Teatre de la Santa Creu (founded on the financial profits of the Hospital de Santa Creu) was the principal home of opera in the city.

secreta. Allí podía hacerse ostentación de la riqueza recién adquirida, pero también disimularse los reveses de la fortuna y tratar de reducir su alcance. Allí los amores ilícitos podían encontrar su desahogo espiritual e incluso físico sin tener que recurrir a la crudeza de la cita clandestina ni asumir sus riesgos, antes el amparo de la mirada tutelar de la buena sociedad barcelonesa.' Cristina Mendoza y Eduardo Mendoza, cited in Sánchez, *Barcelona, 1888-1929*, p. 40.

²¹ Roger Alier, quoted in Joan Ramon Resina, *La vocació de modernitat de Barcelona: auge i declivi d'una imatge urbana*, trans. by Alexandre Gombau i Arnau (Barcelona: Gutenberg, 2008), p. 74.

²² 'La història dels Vuit-cents català és, en bona part, la de les associacions i els cercles on s'integraven els esforços de la burgesia i de la intel·lectualitat per manifestar llur presència en la vida pública'. Jaume Vicens Vives, quoted in Resina, *Barcelona's Vocation of Modernity*, p. 75.

McDonogh places the first performances in 1587²³ and, after the Santa Creu's transformation into the Teatre Principal in 1840 (under the auspices of the Marqués de la Mina), the theatre's programme became more oriented towards the profitable rental of boxes to the landed gentry of the 18th century via a greater concentration on operatic performances.

As the main theatre in Barcelona, the Principal survived a 1787 fire that destroyed the building, as well as the Napoleonic occupation of the city in the early 1800s; however it was the construction of the Liceu, completed in 1847, that provided the Principal with its main rival. One of the earliest appearances of the Liceu in literature is in the 1865 play *Liceístas y Cruzados* by Serafí Pitarra and Enric Carreras, a comedy ridiculing the relationship between the Liceu and the Teatre Principal, whose rivalry was so fierce, that there is anecdotal evidence of supporters of each theatre fighting in the street. The play revolves around Don Lluís, who masquerades as a *principalista* (also called 'cruzado') in his attempt to seduce a young lady. However, farce erupts when it is discovered he is in fact a *liceísta*, underlining the tension between the Principal and its more ostentatious rival. The bewigged Don Ambrós, as a staunch *cruzado*, highlights the reputation of Liceu as a place for superficial social interactions, while the Principal was seen as staid and traditional; a theatre for the elderly:

Since one goes to the Principal/Just to hear music/And to listen to the
singers/And you all go to the Liceu/In low-cut dresses/And horns and
dangly things/And devils and pikes. And he was saying the other
day/When speaking of the Principal/Or things about that theatre/That

²³ Gary McDonogh, 'El Liceu, escenario de conflictos' in Sánchez, *Barcelona 1888-1929*; pp. 80-87 (p. 81).

only old men went there/Eighty or ninety years old/So bald that when
they took off/Their hats when the curtain was up/It seemed they had
been shelled/Like beans.²⁴

The rivalry extended to the quality of the buildings, with the Santa Creu being described as a 'bucket' (*cubell*),²⁵ while the acoustic quality of the Liceu was brought into doubt by Senyor Lluneta's statement that:

Just you see if at the Liceu/any tenor can sing well/because the handrails
in the boxes/Are made of painted cardboard.²⁶

In order to create a building that truly belonged to the elites of the city rather than being founded by royal permission, the construction of the first incarnation of the Liceu was funded by the sale (rather than the usual custom of rental) of boxes, and those families that could afford to abandoned the Liceu's rival theatre and previous home of opera, the Santa Creu or Teatre Principal, for a more prestigious foothold in the new Gran Teatre del Liceu. This method of funding the construction of the theatre turned the Liceu into what Resina describes as a 'joint-stock company'.²⁷ In the same vein, Gary McDonogh underlines not only the stratification of the classes in the society of the time, but also the cohesion of the élite in the construction of the Liceu, and Resina's joint-stock company metaphor gives something of a clue as to the cooperation of the élites and the importance they gave to the creation of the Liceu. On the other hand, Roger

²⁴ '¡Com que al Principal s'hi va/No mes per sentir la música/Y escoltarse á n' als cantants,/Y al Liceo hi aneu totes/Ab lo vestit escotat/Y cuernos y penjarellas/Y diables y botavans[...]/Si fins deya l' altre dia/Que parlar del Principal/O de cosas d'aquell teatro [...]/Que no mes hi anavan vells/De vuytanta ó noranta anys,/Tant calvos, que quant se treyan/Lo barret per sé 'l teló alt,/Semblava que'ls escapssessin/Com monjetas d'esgranar.' Serafi Pitarra and Enric Carreras, *Liceista y cruzados: comedia en dos actes, en vers y en catalá del que ara's parla* (Barcelona: Llibreria española, 1865), p. 16.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁶ 'Vegi vosté si al Liceo/Pót cantar bé cap tenor/Que las baranas dels palcos/Son de cartró pintadot.'
Ibid., p. 19.

²⁷ Resina, *Barcelona's Vocation of Modernity*, p. 40.

Alier and Ramon Arxé consider that the construction of the Liceu was borne not out of an illusory cohesion of the élites but points to the Liceo Filarmónico's²⁸ commission of businessman Joaquim de Gispert d'Anglí as *promotor* (something akin to project manager) to make the Liceu possible, and their recurrence to him at the more difficult periods of the building of the theatre. Nevertheless, the importance of the cooperation of the elites during the construction of the theatre remains paramount due to the shareholders' contributions of 15,000 pesetas plus an annual retainer.²⁹ The issue of funding of the Liceu is then key to the architecture of the building, contributing to the phenomenon of careful 'layering' of the theatre's seating structure, which in turn mirrors large swathes of 19th-century Barcelona architecture: the seats with the best view of the stage are situated on the *planta noble*, suspended above the stalls. This corresponds to the most visible, and therefore most desirable floor for a residence – the *principal* (the first floor above ground level, above the businesses and concierge found underneath). The upper floors of the building grew more cramped and less prestigious the further away from the principal, tallying with the decreasing standing of the boxes and seats in the Liceu. The *galliner* (chicken coop – sometimes referred to as *cazuela* in Spanish) – housed the cheapest seats and the poorest visitors of the Liceu.

In spite of the controlling architecture imposed by those who made the construction of the Liceu possible, the 'democracy' of the *galliner* was an essential part of the class dynamic of the building. The complex co-existence of the classes is manifested in the segregation of entrances at the Liceu; the access to the restricted view seats and benches of the upper floors was from carrer Sant Pau, set around the corner and well apart from the main entrance on La Rambla. This entrance was notoriously

²⁸ The company that came to form the Gran Teatre del Liceu.

²⁹ Aureli Capmany Farrés, *El Café del Liceo, 1837-1937: El teatro y sus bailes de máscaras* (Barcelona: Dalmau, 1943), p. 82.

dingy and cramped, and contrasted sharply with the grand marble staircase of the Rambla entrance that led to the planta noble where the boxes and the access to the stalls were situated. The differentiation of entrances for the two 'sets' of patrons of the Liceu led to a curious social interaction in that despite occupying the same building, the upper and lower classes are only linked to each other by their view of each other, rather than physical interaction. Testimonials of this alienating relationship can be found in the student writings of author Josep Pla and Joaquín María de Nadal Ferrer, the son of a one-time mayor of Barcelona and member of Joventut Monàrquica, a right-wing youth organisation. Their panoramas of the Liceu from their own personal and social viewpoint provide some insight into the complex social hierarchy that a visit to the Liceu entailed in the early part of the 20th century.

Josep Pla, in his memoir *Papers d'un estudiant* (*Student Writings*, 1956) writes about the Liceu from the less privileged, but no less colourful viewpoint of the fifth floor. Pla couples the *galliner* audience's musical passion with their 'Olympian disdain' for the upper classes,³⁰ who used the Liceu as a forum for political and social discussion rather than as a temple to music. Nevertheless, Pla finds himself unable to remain indifferent to the dazzling ostentation of the upper classes:

The spectacle of the Liceu on a good night is magnificent when viewed from the fifth floor is one of the most extraordinary in the country. In my youth, my sensibilities were especially enthralled by the panoramic vision, by the morbid detachment of the view from a point high above the sea or the land. From the fifth floor of the Liceu the view is literally fabulous – an ocean of bourgeoisie, dripping with jewels and diamonds. What a

³⁰ Josep Pla, *Barcelona: Papers d'un estudiant*, Obres Completes (Barcelona: Selecta, 1956) p. 195.

spectacle, by God! In addition, there were the music fanatics, with or without score in hand, for whom nothing but the music of the drama was important. These fans had an Olympian disdain for the bourgeois sea below them. They didn't even look at them. As they considered themselves musically superior, they thought of the bourgeoisie as a somewhat dense concentration of idiocy.³¹

In this extract, despite Pla's sense of wonderment at the scintillating view before him, his detachment from the Liceu and its audience is palpable, and later on in the text he calls himself vulgar compared to the music-lovers he was surrounded by, claiming that while he enjoyed the music, he did not feel in possession of it. Given this distance from the audience, both in terms of social status and musical knowledge, he purports to present himself as an 'objective' viewer of the panorama of the 'bourgeois ocean', comparing his emotional and sociological reaction to the view from the *galliner* to that of the view from the top of a mountain. Within the 'pure and simple panorama'³² of the Liceu, Pla compares the partitions of the boxes underneath him to museum exhibits; display cabinets of the various families that owned them:

³¹ 'L'espectacle que presenta el Liceu del cinquè pis estant, en una bona nit, és magnífic, és un dels panorames més extraordinaris del país. En l'època de la joventut, la sensibilitat queda especialment fascinada per la visió panoràmica, per la morbosa disfibració que produeix la contemplació des d'una altura situada sobre el mar o sobre la terra. [...] Des del cinquè pis del Liceu, el panorama era literalment fabulós: es veia un oceà de burgesia, guspirejant de joies, de brillants i de tota classe de pedres dures. Quin meravellós espectacle, valga'm Déu! [...] Després, hi havia els melòmans recalcitrants, amb solfa a la mà o sense, per als quals només comptava la música del drama. Aquests melòmans tenien un menyspreu olímpic per l'oceà burgès que els apareixia davant de la vista. Ni se'ls miraven. Com que es consideraven musicalment superiors, conceptuaven que el panorama burgès era una concentració, més aviat densa, de cretinisme', Pla, *Papers d'un estudiant*, p. 195.

³² 'Panorama pur i simple', *ibid.*, p. 196.

The auditorium seemed like a museum, and the stage – the lyric drama – even more so. An archaic sight, conserved in an enormous, fabulous display case.³³

Pla's description of the *buenas familias* as museum pieces hints at their increasing decadence and irrelevance within the larger spectrum of turn-of-the-century Catalan society in Barcelona. Their antiquated nature meant that rather than the boxes being used for their intended function, they are more for ornament rather than actual use. By contrast, Joaquim de Nadal Ferrer, from the privileged viewpoint of his family box, is described as 'conscious of those looking down',³⁴ but the following extract from McDonogh betrays Nadal Ferrer's and, perhaps by extension, the bourgeoisie's own sense of self-importance through his presumption that those in the *galliner* would know precisely who is who in the illuminated seats below:

The most humble seamstress would have been able to name the owners of the boxes of the *piso principal* faultlessly, and even many of the owners of the individual seats.³⁵

In contrast to Pla's class-conscious view, Nadal Ferrer's largely nostalgic remembrances depict a Liceu that transcended class; the spectacle of both the auditorium and the stage united viewers from the boxes to the *galliner*. Nadal Ferrer imagines those in the *galliner* enviously gossiping and admiring those in the boxes below, whereas Pla, who attended the Liceu as a student in the *galliner* presents a social interaction that is less rosy than that of Nadal Ferrer.

³³ 'La sala em semblava un museu i l'escenari – el drama líric – encara m'ho semblava més. Un espectacle arcaic, posat a conserva a dins d'una enorme i fastuosa vitrina', *ibid.*, p. 200.

³⁴ Gary W. McDonogh, *Good Families of Barcelona: A Social History of Power in the Industrial Era* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 195.

³⁵ 'La costurera más humilde del gallinero podría haber dicho, sin error alguno, los nombres de los propietarios de los palcos del piso principal e incluso aquéllos de muchas de las butacas individuales' McDonogh, 'El Liceo, escenario de conflictos' in Sánchez, *Barcelona 1888-1929*, p. 86.

A comparison of Nadal Ferrer's and Pla's testimonials reveal that despite their differing locations in the theatre they both participate in the prestige construct of the Liceu; they agree on socially 'preferable' norms by sharing the physical panorama and the prestige boundaries of the Liceu, but have differing sociological visions in their view of the same auditorium. Here Pla and Nadal Ferrer are interacting with what social theorist Bernd Wegener calls the 'value consensus paradox':³⁶ both ends of the social spectrum theoretically agree on what is to be 'preferred' in society, and as such agree on where to place the potential boundaries of these 'preferences'. However, due to the differing physical locations of each arbiter, differential social perceptions of the same boundaries result. However, the lower-status arbiter (i.e. Pla) is disadvantaged by what sociologist Abram de Swaan terms 'jealous relations'.³⁷ The combination of physical distance and the 'jealous relations' inhibit the lower classes from being able to observe and assimilate the social behaviour of the upper classes. Thus, within the 'value consensus paradox', the upper class (in this case, represented by Nadal Ferrer) effectively becomes a superarbiter, reinforcing the social closure of the élite and their dominion and manipulation of prestige. In the case of the Liceu, the 'culturological construct' of prestige is given physical manifestation through the differentiated entrances to the galliner and upper floors.³⁸

Perhaps unsurprisingly, as families bought up the shares in the Liceu, the boxes became extensions to the family home, and were an important part of inheritances (as

³⁶ Bernd Wegener, 'Concepts and Measurement of Prestige', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 18 (1992), 253-80 (p. 273).

³⁷ Abram De Swann, 'Jealousy as a Class Phenomenon: The Petite Bourgeoise and Social Security', *International Sociology*, 4 (1989), 259-71 (p. 262).

³⁸ Stanley H. Udy, 'The Configuration of Occupational Structure', in *Sociological Theory and Research*, ed. by Hubert M. Blalock (New York, NY: Free Press, 1980), 156-65 (p. 161).

McDonogh has chronicled).³⁹ The importance of the polyvalent roles of the boxes appears in both literature and chronicles of the Liceu; Adorno's consideration of opera's historical function as 'a bourgeois vacation spot' turns the boxes into 'embassies to society', providing useful salons that fulfilled societal duty:⁴⁰ friends flitted between *avantlloctges* (the small, semi-public reception areas of the boxes) paying casual visits, courtship was initiated in the boxes (as seen in Eduardo Mendoza's novel *La ciudad de los prodigios*, translated as *The City of Marvels*),⁴¹ and even where children were taken to be nursed during the performances.⁴² As shareholders in the Liceu, the box owners formed a commission that named the governing body of the theatre as well as having some influence in the artistic and social programme, organising galas and the famed masquerade balls that took place at the Liceu.⁴³ As eminent members of the city, the owners founded the Cercle del Liceu shortly after the opening of the theatre in 1847. The two semi-private and undoubtedly exclusive spaces of the boxes and the Cercle del Liceu have their own gendered assumptions: complementary to the social, quasi-public nature of the boxes, the Cercle provided an exclusive male-oriented club (women were allowed to enter as guests) for the important families of Barcelona. Integrated into the building of the Liceu, the Cercle occupied the first floor of the building, accessible from the class-specific *planta noble*, allowing its patrons to combine both social 'duty' and discussion of business outside the performances in the theatre and beyond the active opera season. Gary McDonogh, delineates the Cercle as a male-dominated, business-driven space complemented by the world of the boxes where women carried out social

³⁹ Gary W. McDonogh, *Las buenas familias de Barcelona: Historia social de poder en la era industrial*, trans by Mercedes Güell (Barcelona: Omega, 1989), p. 256.

⁴⁰ David J. Levin, *Opera Through Other Eyes* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), p. 1.

⁴¹ Eduardo Mendoza, *La ciudad de los prodigios*, (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1986), p. 304.

⁴² Joaquim M. de Nadal, *Memòries d'un estudiant barceloní: cromos de la vida vuitcentista* (Barcelona: Dalmau i Jover, 1952), p. 105.

⁴³ McDonogh, *Good Families of Barcelona*, p. 247.

duties. Notably, it is the women that make up the most visual aspect of the spectacle of the Liceu. In the testimonials of the Italian traveller Edmondo de Amicis, Pla, Nadal Ferrer and in the literary representations of Oller it is the dresses and accoutrements of the female visitors that create the sparkling vision of the Liceu that so captivates the writers.⁴⁴ The ostentation of the women's apparel and jewels is one of the principal components of the shimmering panorama of the auditorium.

Underpinning the mutual viewing of the patrons of the Liceu and thus facilitating the social hierarchy is the prominence given to the illumination of the theatre. In common with other 19th-century opera houses, the enormous amount of gas lights (estimated at around 2,500 by Resina) remained lit throughout performances at the Liceu.⁴⁵ If, as cultural theorist Wolfgang Schivelbusch concludes, 'auditorium lighting is a reliable guide to the social character of any particular theatre'⁴⁶ the fulsome illumination of the Liceu during the performances underlines the premium that the bourgeoisie placed on being seen; the constant illumination of the auditorium provided the upper classes with a forum for both rivalry and self-congratulation, with the *buenas familias* able to compete with each other in social ostentation. Music historian Xosé Aviñoa highlights the discussion over the illumination of the Liceu, pointing to the discussion in contemporary press over the necessity to turn the gas lights out during the performances:

Let us not be self-deceiving and speak the whole truth: the Liceu of
Barcelona is almost the only, if not in fact the only, truly beautiful

⁴⁴ See Oller, *La febre d'or*, Millors Obres de la Literatura Catalana (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1980), p. 106; Edmondo de Amicis, *Spagna* <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/30605/30605-h/30605-h.htm>> [accessed 30 August 2010], p. 30.

⁴⁵ Resina, *Barcelona's Vocation of Modernity*, p. 55.

⁴⁶ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. by Angela Davis (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 209-10.

location for socialising, and while the stage performance is an attraction which motivates attendance at the opera house, the main interest is concentrated in the auditorium rather than on the stage, and consequently, it is preferable that this should be illuminated at all times, as without light, there is no incentive whatsoever for the mutual expression of habitual theatre goers.⁴⁷

This anonymous comment printed in the *La Vanguardia* newspaper is an excellent example of what the theatre had come to symbolise for the bourgeoisie; the musical function merely provides the attraction for the ‘punters’, while the undoubted focus for the writer of the above is the social interaction, which the continuous illumination of the auditorium enables, providing an opportunity for the elite to view themselves en masse as a social force. Indeed, Nadal Ferrer reinforces the theme through his consideration that the lighting of the Liceu allowed the elite opera-goer to discern not who is there, but rather, who isn’t.⁴⁸ The compartments of the boxes act as shop windows for the ‘good families’, and the horseshoe configuration of the Liceu allowed for panoramic views of the theatre that encompassed both the performance on the stage, and the ‘pure exhibitionism’ of the nobility and bourgeoisie.⁴⁹

Such focus on the social aspects of the Liceu might suggest that the artistic raison d’être of the institution – that is to say, the performative aspect – is subordinated to social ostentation, and for the upper classes this is arguably the case given the resources

⁴⁷ ‘Hay que desengañarse y decir la verdad por completo, el Liceo de Barcelona es casi el único o poco menos, hermoso sitio de verdadera sociabilidad, y si bien la representación escénica es un atractivo que motiva la asistencia al teatro, el interés principal se concentra en la sala más que en el escenario, y por consecuencia la iluminación de la misma es de carácter preferente, pues sin luz no existe aliciente alguno para la mutua expresión de los habituales concurrentes.’ Xosé Aviñoa, ‘L’afició operística a Barcelona’ in *El Liceu: un teatre de tots?: Barcelona Metròpolis Mediterrània*, 48 (Barcelona: Ajuntament de Barcelona, 1999) p. 45.

⁴⁸ Nadal, *Memòries d’un estudiant barceloní*, p. 133.

⁴⁹ Pla, *Barcelona: papers d’un estudiant*, p. 199.

they had and the amount of physical space set aside for this purpose. However, the argument that the importance of the performances at the Liceu took second place to the social showcasing and business is not, I would argue, valid for the whole of the audience. The Liceu's importance as an extension of the stock exchange floor is not in question, but as indicated by Josep Pla, the Liceu audience was a demanding one, requiring vocal excellence rather than novelty of staging:⁵⁰ not even Enrico Caruso was not exempt from being booed after a bad performance.

FROM THE *GALLINER* TO THE *LLOTJA*: PRESTIGE AND CLASS AT THE LICEU

Roger Alier in *L'òpera a Barcelona* affirms that it is since the end of the 18th century that opera in Barcelona was a passion shared by all classes;⁵¹ however given the literary evidence, it is clear to see that separation of classes was an innate quality built into the Liceu, resulting in a relatively precise stratification of class that appears to be common knowledge amongst opera goers. What arises repeatedly from contemporary sources is not only the social cohesion of the elite, but the strength of this class stratification. That is to say, the Liceu as a whole confers prestige on those that attend, but on the inside, the inequalities are subtly expressed in the physical configuration and thus the demographic is carefully controlled, and conceived of en bloc according to their physical station in the Liceu. Francesc Puig Alonso, writer of *Curiositats barcelonines*, divides the theatre between 'aristocracy' in the planta noble and the first floor, 'mesocracy' in the second and third, and 'democracy' in the upper floors of the Liceu.⁵²

⁵⁰ Resina, *Barcelona's Vocation of Modernity*, p. 57.

⁵¹ Roger Alier, *L'òpera a Barcelona: Orígens, desenvolupament i consolidació de l'òpera com a espectacle teatral a la Barcelona del segle XVIII* (Barcelona, Institut d'estudis catalans, 1990), p. 3.

⁵² McDonogh, 'El Liceu, escenari de conflictes' in Sánchez, *Barcelona; 1888-1929*, p. 83.

The concepts of prestige and class at the Liceu are closely linked, since a membership to the Liceu was an accepted measure of a person's class, whether they attended for social or musical reasons. Indeed, while literature seems to suggest that one required contacts, or a certain level of prestige to attend the Liceu (or at least to enter on La Rambla, rather than on carrer Sant Pau), the act of attending the Liceu conferred greater prestige on the person involved. The presence of any special provision at all made for opera aficionados of lower class at all is in itself remarkable, and is one of the reasons why Catalan literature frequently insists upon the uniqueness of the Liceu, both within a Spanish and international context. For example, Josep Pla refers to this in his student writings: 'the Liceu is [a] theatre that is totally different from the others in our country, and the audience is completely different'.⁵³ From a socio-historical perspective, discussion of the Liceu by and large focuses on the complex co-existence of the upper classes and industrial bourgeoisie that the Liceu was founded by, and the lower classes that were arguably the most devoted and demanding part of the audience.

This cross-class enthusiasm for opera then manifests itself in the physical embodiment of the Liceu; built by the bourgeoisie and the nobility exercising their right to pre-eminence through the construction of the auditorium that ensured maximum visibility for themselves, but at the same time included (an admittedly minimal) provision for the lower classes to hear opera, reflecting Talcott Parson's consideration that 'all societies institutionalize some balance between equality and inequality'.⁵⁴ In the context of the Liceu, prestige is stratified to 'assert the basic importance of equality of

⁵³ 'El Liceu és [un] teatre absolutament diferent dels altres, en el nostre país, i el públic hi és completament distint'. Pla, *Barcelona: papers d'un estudiant*, p. 194.

⁵⁴ Talcott Parsons, 'Equality and Inequality in Modern Society, or Social Stratification Revisited', in *Social Stratification: Research and Theory for the 1970s*, ed. by Edward O. Laumann (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970), 13-72 (p. 19).

membership status, but at the same time makes allowance for the inequalities which will result from achievement motives protected by equality of opportunity'.⁵⁵ One of the essential traits of the Liceu in literature is its importance as a social barometer; with the exception of the *galliner*, it requires status to enter, and in turn confers prestige on the person attending. Care should be used when differentiating between the concepts of 'status' and 'prestige'; here Bernd Wegener's paraphrased distinction is useful; 'status' will reflect an objective difference in assets, while the use of 'prestige' connotes a valuative aspect, usually related to the former. In the case of the Liceu, prestige differences, and the resultant social inequality are manifested in the physical structure of the building, and as such comes to constitute what Wegener refers to as an 'integrated system of values'.⁵⁶ This very issue of prestige is central to Narcís Oller's Barcelona epic *La febre d'or* and constitutes protagonist Gil Foix's *raison d'être*. Talcott Parsons names five criteria that potentially constitute the 'requirements' for the acquisition of prestige: membership of a kinship unit, personal qualities (also referred to as 'charisma'), achievement, possessions, authority and additionally, power.⁵⁷ Sociologist Edward Shils mirrors Parsons's underlining of personal qualities and/or charisma as one of the most important bases of prestige, defining charisma as 'what is thought to be his connection with [...] some very central feature of man's existence and the cosmos in which he lives'.⁵⁸ Likewise, charisma is embodied in those occupational roles that are 'in their functions closest to the centers'.⁵⁹ The bottom line of these complex arguments is that Parsons implies that prestige serves a double function.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 68.

⁵⁶ Wegener, 'Concepts of Measurement of Prestige', *Annual Review of Sociology*, p. 255.

⁵⁷ Talcott Parsons, *Sociological Theory and Modern Society* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1967), pp. 848-89.

⁵⁸ Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*, Selected Papers of Edward Shils, 11 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 258.

⁵⁹ Edward Shils, 'Deference', in *Social Stratification*, ed. by J. A. Jackson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968). pp. 104-32 (p. 107).

Prestige is the expression of group solidarity, embodied in this case of in the 'solidary kinship unit' of the Liceu,⁶⁰ and it is a motivating agent for achievements. This evidently places a premium on a certain amount of 'groupthink' and the will or desire for social acceptance within the wider sociological context. The unit of the box, and the greater unit of the Liceu, is the representation of this double function and is a symbol necessary for access to the kinship unit of *La febre d'or*'s bourgeoisie and is thus the object of Gil Foix's desires.

This sense of achievement, in the context of the Liceu, is perhaps best expressed through *La febre d'or*. Reading through Oller's novel, Shils's 'center' could be construed as the Llotja, Barcelona's stock exchange and the embodiment of the boom economy in 1880s Catalonia. Foix's successes at the Llotja afford him access to many of the bases required for prestige: his monetary gains fulfil Parsons's conditions of achievement and possessions. These, in turn, entitle him to authority and deference, and so signal power. Together, achievements, possessions, authority and power equal access to the kinship unit (the Liceu), thus completing the acquisition of prestige.

PANORAMIC VISIONS OF BARCELONA: EDMONDO DE AMICIS'S *SPAGNA* AND NARCÍS

OLLER'S *LA FEBRE D'OR*

As an increasingly powerful and Europeanised society, the 19th-century Barcelona bourgeoisie conceived of the necessity to capture the city in its rapidly-urbanising form in order to crystallise the essence of the city as a point of reference for the future. With Barcelona ever looking to Paris for models of urban behaviour and traits, Zola and Balzac's depictions of the French capital in the late 19th century, and Dickens's visions of

⁶⁰ Parsons, *Sociological Theory and Modern Society*, p. 849.

industrial London acted as templates for the 'great novel about Barcelona' (la gran novel·la sobre Barcelona); a grand *Gesamtkunstwerk* that would definitively encapsulate the city. The search for a (more-or-less) representative view of the Liceu in literature dovetails with the search for a definitive book about Barcelona; the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* arises repeatedly in literary depictions of the Liceu, interweaving various concepts and phenomena, both local and universal, to capture the nature of the theatre and its place in the city's landscape. In order to portray the vital essence of the theatre, writers appear to consider the following concepts fundamental for their depictions of the Liceu:

Firstly, in sociological and demographic terms, the importance of 'prestige', and its expression vis-à-vis 'class' and monetary value is crucial, even overwhelming, in 19th-century manifestations of the Liceu, whether the depiction is contemporaneous or modern. The supposed prestige bestowed on individuals and the theatre's social importance to the city are themes restated in almost every mention of the Liceu in literature and underline the Liceu's status as a creator of social measurement and value. Following from the prestige requirements as an essential part of the historical and literary view of the Liceu, as I have shown, writers underline the stunning view and precedence of visuality of the Liceu. The elegance and beauty of the building itself, the frontage, the lighting of the auditorium and the dress of the patrons create a particularly spectacular impression that writers attempt to capture as if in a photograph, taking particular care over the architectural details of the theatre as part of the physical *Gesamtkunstwerk* of the theatre, in comparison to the social view of the theatre's patrons as mentioned above.

The attempts to view the 'bourgeois ocean' of the Liceu in one glance can be mirrored in the vision of the city: the natural geography of Barcelona favours the

experience of taking in the city in one glance; the same mountains of Tibidabo and Montjuïc that (to some extent) geographically define the limits of the city afford viewpoints that place a premium on panoramic visions of the city. These all-encompassing views that purport to present a concept of ‘the whole of Barcelona’ appear frequently appear in literary and latter-day cinematic depictions of the city. Marvin Carlson makes reference to the double viewing of theatres in reference to the positioning of theatre in Ancient Greece, noting that theatres were built according to the natural contours of the land; the cirque of the theatre often faced over the city as well:

‘In many cities, including Corinth, Priene and Ephesus, the spectator in the theatre sees before him not only the performance space, but a magnificent perspective of the lower city, the ramparts, and beyond them, the plain or the sea.[...] Such theatres serve a double function, like that propounded by Roland Barthes for the Eiffel Tower – they are cultural monuments in their own right and also mechanisms for presenting to their users a striking panorama of artificial and natural space.’⁶¹

Barthès’s use of the Eiffel Tower as a cultural monument and panorama (in the case of the Liceu, a social panorama) is exemplified by Italian traveller Edmondo de Amicis, who is arguably one of the first of what might be recognised as modern travel writers. Making his way around Spain in the early 1870s, he visits historic cities, with the beginning of each section attempting to transcribe a panoramic view of each city visited. Likewise, a visit to the Liceu provokes a similar attempt to capture both the architecture and the demographic, which De Amicis seems to consider a representative reduction of

⁶¹ Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 62.

the city's character.⁶² The impressions of De Amicis are useful in constructing an image of the Liceu, since the views of the outsider are truth to them, as fleeting, or indeed as unrepresentative of the actual city as they may be; a case in point here might be cruise ship passengers arriving in Barcelona – their brief experience of Barcelona is likely to be a walk up and down La Rambla, and even the most jaded *barceloní* is likely to admit such an experience is unlikely to be representative of the city, its culture or character. However, sociologist Manuel Delgado holds that these 'trans-urban' wanderers are in optimum conditions to perceive the singular nature of cities that they visit;⁶³ whether that consist of a few hours' wandering through the streets or a fleeting first impression.

Richard F. Burton, famed 19th-century traveller wrote:

Despise not, gentle reader, first impressions, especially in a traveller...I am convinced, however, that a sharp, well-defined outline is to be drawn, it must be done immediately after arrival at a place; when the sense of contrast is still fresh upon the mind, and before the second and third have ousted first thoughts.⁶⁴

Echoing Burton's Polaroid-like mental images is Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who claimed of his arrival in Paris:

And when I arrived there for the first time, the first roads I saw as I left the station were, like the first words spoken by a stranger, the manifestations of a still-ambiguous essence, but now incomparable.⁶⁵

⁶² Edmondo de Amicis, *Spagna*, p. 30 <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/30605/30605-h/30605-h.htm>> [accessed 30 August 2010]

⁶³ Manuel Delgado, *Sociedades movedizas: pasos hacia una antropología de las calles* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2007), p. 75.

⁶⁴ Sir Richard Francis Burton, *Wanderings in West Africa from Liverpool to Fernando Po* (Dover; London: Constable, 1991) pp. 20-21.

⁶⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 328.

The importance and content of this momentary impression form the basis of many of the depictions that concern the Liceu – the writers attempt to capture a photographic memory in text of the sparkling brilliance of the ‘bourgeois ocean’ of seas and jewels.

Returning to De Amicis, the Genoan novelist and writer takes in the panorama of the Liceu in its second incarnation after the 1861 fire, and delights in the spectacle offered by the combination of the horseshoe-shaped auditorium and the favourable lighting of the theatre. In his vision, the women of the Liceu are the protagonists of the scene, and he transforms the jewels and the dresses of the women of the stalls into luminous ‘garlands of dewy camellias’.⁶⁶ The semi-private, yet effervescent nature of the intense social scene of the Liceu is also not lost on De Amicis; he notes the wide proportions of the corridors of the *planta noble* allows people to pass each other without crowding, but also permitting a visual inspection of bourgeois society at a proximity that the compartmentalisation of the boxes did not favour:

The vast boxes are divided by a wooden partition that descends from the wall to the parapet, exposing those that are seated at the front; thus the theatre seems all galleries and acquires a lightness that is a pleasure to view. Everything protrudes, everything is uncovered, light shines everywhere, all the spectators can see the other spectators, the aisles are spacious, one can come and go and with ease, one can regard all the ladies from a thousand angles, pass from the galleries to the boxes, from the boxes to the galleries, stroll, gather around, loaf about here and there all night, without bumping into anyone. The other parts of the building

⁶⁶ Edmondo de Amicis, *Spagna*, p. 30.

are proportional to the main parts: corridors, staircases, landings and halls like a grand palace.⁶⁷

Further details from *Spagna* underline the mercantile and specifically Catalan nature of the Liceu in their incessant trading, even at the opera house:

Yet, even here where the good Barcelonians should not think of anything else but resting from their daily grind and regarding their beautiful and fine women, even here the good Barcelonians buy, sell, play, negotiate like lost souls. In the corridors is a constant coming and going of bank workers, office workers carrying dispatches and messages, and a constant mercantile clamour. Barbarians!⁶⁸

This devotion to trade as a Catalan trait is immediately plain to De Amicis as an outsider; therein lies the importance of his work – *Spagna* was written during the start of the economic boom in Catalonia, in the midst of Barcelona's growing importance and international projection on the European stage as the industrial capital of Spain in the late 19th century that would culminate in the 1888 Universal Exhibition.

A few years after De Amicis's travelogue, the author Narcís Oller paints a picture of the Liceu as a Catalan experiencing Barcelona in the boom years of the 1880s, referred to as 'the Golden Age'. Called 'un petit Zola' by his contemporaries, Oller was

⁶⁷ 'I palchi, vastissimi, sono divisi da un assito che s'abbassa dal muro verso il parapetto, lasciando scoperto tutto il busto delle persone sedute sulle prime seggiole; in modo che, all'occhio, il teatro par fatto tutto a gallerie, e n'acquista un'aria di leggerezza che fa un bellissimo vedere. Tutto sporge, tutto è scoperto, la luce batte in ogni parte, ogni spettatore vede tutti gli spettatori, le corsie son spaziose, si va, si viene, si gira a tutt'agio da ogni lato, si può contemplare ogni signora da mille punti, passare dalle gallerie ai palchi, dai palchi alle gallerie, passeggiare, far crocchio, bighellonare tutta la sera di qua e di là, senza urtar nel gomito anima viva. Le altre parti dell'edifizio sono proporzionate alla principale: corridoi, scale, pianerottoli, vestiboli da gran palazzo', Ibid.

⁶⁸ 'Eppure, anche qui dove i buoni Barcellonesi non dovrebbero pensare ad altro che a ricrearsi dalle fatiche della giornata nella contemplazione delle loro belle e superbe donne, anche qui i buoni Barcellonesi comprano, vendono, giocano, trafficano, come anime dannate. Nei corridoi è un andirivieni continuo di agenti di banca, di commessi d'ufficio, di portatori di dispacci, e un continuo vocio da mercato. Barbari!', ibid.

unofficially given the commission to reproduce Barcelona in print given his realist tendencies and his sensibilities to class difference. Considered a contender in the debate for the definitive book about Barcelona, Oller's epic novel *La febre d'or* charts the social and physical transformation of Barcelona caused by the economic impetus of the arrival of the railways in 1848. Oller details the financial dealings and economic development of the stock exchange (Llotja) that made the social transformation of Barcelona possible by charting the fortunes of Gil Foix, a modest Catalan banker whose skill and luck on the stock exchange take him from the petite bourgeoisie to the upper echelons of Barcelona society, measured by a change of residence, increasing possessions and the acquisition of a lover; all three considered necessary by Foix as badges of membership to the Barcelona bourgeoisie.

Even in *La febre d'or* the panorama of the city appears as a device to chart the rise of the nouveau Catalan bourgeoisie: in chapter XIII of *La febre d'or I* the Foix family visit the inauguration of the Giró palace, a mansion high above the city, and are stunned by the surrounding view of the city, representing the apex of the bourgeoisie's climb to power.⁶⁹ However, the sheer force of Foix's desire to acquire these badges underlines his *parvenu* status, never really accepted into the fold; forever a 'wannabe', and rather than truly transcending class barriers, Foix merely surrounds himself with what he (or indeed society) considers the trappings of a universalised bourgeois society. Access to the Liceu is one of the more powerful symbols of the transition from mere successful entrepreneur to part of Barcelona society; encapsulating the close-knit upper-class society that the nouveau riche industrialists of the Golden Age aspired to, and symbolising the successful acquisition of prestige; a necessary commodity. Oller devotes

⁶⁹ Rosa Cabré, *La Barcelona de Narcís Oller: Realitat i somni de la ciutat* (Barcelona: Cossetània Edicions, 2004) p. 65.

the eighth chapter of the first volume of *La febre d'or* to a description of the Foix family's memorable night at the Liceu, and is able to make the most of his realistic sensibilities to convey a detailed panorama of the Liceu, both in demographic and physical terms, and goes some way to explaining the powerful symbolism imbued into the Liceu by the bourgeoisie. As such, in *La febre d'or*, Oller goes beyond mere connotation and provides a quasi-historical description of events, which Alan Yates situates in 1881,⁷⁰ at the crescendo of the Golden Age.

In common with many nineteenth-century writers, Oller frequently uses descriptions of lighting as a sign of modernity, echoing Schivelbusch's aforementioned theory. In the instance of short story *Lo transplantat* (The Man Out of Place) from his *Croquis del natural* collection, first published in 1879, Oller combines the panoramic experience of the view of Barcelona and Catalonia's quick adoption of new technologies to describe the experience of country baker Daniel, who is dazzled by the scintillating carpet of light he views as he arrives in rapidly-industrialising Barcelona by train.⁷¹ This use of light as a metonym for modernity and new technology appears again in *La febre d'or*, as Oller describes the play of light, both natural and artificial, in the Liceu. Oller contrasts the brilliance of the electric lighting in the public areas of the Liceu with the darkness of the auditorium: 'the splendid light of the candelabras was transformed into luminous, iridescent rays by the diamonds and emeralds [of the ladies]'⁷² complements 'a dark, gothic room, covered in large lizards, serpents, parchment books, stills and

⁷⁰ Alan Yates, *Narcís Oller: Tradició i talent individual* (Barcelona: Curial, 1998), p. 268.

⁷¹ Narcís Oller, *Croquis del natural* (Barcelona: Cossetània Edicions, 2007), p. 72.

⁷² 'L'esplèndida claror del canelobres destriava en lluminosos raigs tornassolats en topar amb les facetes dels brillants i maragdes' Narcís Oller, *La febre d'or I*, p. 109.

skulls'⁷³ – the production described by Oller appears to be one of the first to be held in a darkened auditorium in contrast to the fulsomely-lit performances held previously.

Following the descriptions of the physical aspect of the Liceu, Oller turns to the inhabitants thereof: from the spectacle of arrival at the entrance on La Rambla, the stuffed upper circles of the theatre, to the 'shop assistants and clerks, owners of the boxes on the third floor [...] beautiful women, adorned with flowers [...] and elegant men',⁷⁴ Oller gives some idea of the stratification of the floors of the theatre, from the modest entrepreneurs seated higher up to the wealthy socialites that would occupy the more expensive boxes and the stalls. Against the background of this social framework, the success and trajectory of the Foix family of *La febre d'or* can be divined by their acquisition of a box at the Liceu. This quasi-obligatory status symbol enables the women of the house to represent the family in society, and also allows Gil Foix to become a member of the Cercle del Liceu and to enjoy its function as a *tertúlia* (social gathering) and the political contacts that Cercle membership entails; a prize for any Barcelona merchant. Like many other patrons of the Liceu, Gil's attendance at the Liceu is motivated not out of a love for music, but out of the social connections and status a box at the Liceu ostensibly guarantees. While one might argue that Oller's own portrayal follows the habitual pattern of representations of the Liceu as a nexus for the upper classes, with little reference to the working classes, the unique detailing of the theatre's physical aspects, as well as its clues to the social makeup of late 19th-century Barcelona goes beyond 'typical' representations, and acts as a genuine cultural reference. Oller displays sincere pride when describing the Liceu: 'the theatre had that most shining and

⁷³ 'Una habitació gòtica i fosca, entre grans llargandaixos, serpotes, llibrots de pergamí, alambins i caps de mort', *ibid.*

⁷⁴ 'Dependents de botiga i d'escriptori, possessionats de les llotges del terç pis, [...] les belles fembres, agençades de flors, [...] i homes elegants', *ibid.*, p. 108.

distinguished aspect that is only seen in the best theatres in the world'.⁷⁵ Furthermore, the climactic moment of a performance at the Liceu gives Oller the opportunity to wax lyrical and provide an illustration of the range of emotions and actions both on stage and behind the scenes in the Cercle:

At the Liceu, enchanted Margarida falls into the arms of her seducer, won over with love; Eladi wildly applauded the diabolical union of two naïve souls suffering from the devil's wickedness, Delfineta starts dreaming of the persistent stares that the Baron of Esmalrich has been directing at her the entire night, Rodon and Foix relish their latest winnings, Caterina yawns, and Pauleta and Montserrat, waving their handkerchiefs, exclaim:

- Magnificent!
- Sublime!
- Heavenly!
- Isn't he! Delightful, incredible!⁷⁶

In this passage Oller is able to weave together the various functions of the Liceu – the virtuoso performance of Angelo Masini brings the house down,⁷⁷ daughter Delfina dreams of a suitor, business partners Rodon and Foix triumph in their money-making ability, Foix's wife Caterina represents the average barcelonina that cares little for the

⁷⁵ 'El conjunt del teatre presentava aquell aspecte brillantíssim i distingit que sols es veu en els millors teatres del món', Oller, *La febre d'or I*, p. 109.

⁷⁶ Al Liceu, l'encisada Margarida cau vençuda per l'amor als braços del seductor [the tenor], Eladi aplaudeix rabiosament aquella diabòlica conjunció de dos esperits candorosos sotmesos a la maldat del dimoni, la Delfineta comença a somiar amb les persistents mirades que des de l'amfiteatre li està clavant tota la nit el baró d'Esmalrich, en Rodon i en Foix assaboreixen interiorment els guanys darrers, la Catarina fa un badall de son, i la Pauleta i la Montserrat, fent voleiar els mocadors, exclamen:

- És magnífic!
- Sublime!
- Una cosa del cel!
- Oi que sí? Celestial, increïble! Oller, *La febre d'or I*, p. 114.

⁷⁷ Oller based his description on the real visit of the tenor to the Liceu, whose stay was so successful a street in the Sants area was named after him.

spectacle of the Liceu, while companions Pauleta and Montserrat embody the musically demanding Liceu audience.

Foix's very being revolves around the acquisition of money and the world he constructs around himself reflects this, but his motivations for achievement are treated by Narcís Oller ambiguously, who describes Foix's change from modest businessman to hungry entrepreneur and the resultant changing scale of moral values as he ascends the ranks of Barcelona society. Each rank is denoted by the acquisition of certain items and an expected social equivalence in the company he keeps – in *La febre d'or* these achievements are exemplified in a way that reflects the stratified architecture of the Liceu. The Foix family move from their cramped flat on the modest carrer d'en Gíriti in the tangle of La Ribera to the far more prestigious residence on the *principal* (the most visible floor) of a house on fashionable carrer Ample. In addition to the new residence, Foix acquires a box at the Liceu and replaces his previously modest, equal-status wife Caterina with a high-status French *cocotte* on a business trip to Paris. The box is the ultimate expression of prestige in contemporary society, while the *cocotte* enhances his charisma through its desirable links to the French capital, the paragon of achievement according to the Barcelona of the 1880s. Latter-day critics note that the Barcelona that appears in Oller's novels is not so much realistic as idealised; Margarida Casacuberta argues that what Oller offers in reality is an idealisation of Barcelona bourgeois culture through status symbols that relate more to the bourgeois readers than the wider population of the city.⁷⁸ Within this idealisation then, perhaps the Liceu depicted by Oller is, like Tom Sutcliffe's definition of opera, a construction that reunites Oller's own preferences:⁷⁹ the perfect performance at the Liceu that almost brings the house down,

⁷⁸ Margarida Casacuberta, Marina Gustà (eds.), *Narrativa urbana: La construcció literaria de Barcelona* (Barcelona: Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat, 2008), p. 25.

⁷⁹ Tom Sutcliffe, *Believing in Opera* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p. 17.

the exquisite elegance of the costumes of the women, the ideal business transaction – all described in the idealised climactic scene that unites the major themes of the novel into one moment in what might be described as the single most emblematic building for the Barcelona bourgeoisie. Despite the accusations of idealisations that Margarida Casacuberta ascribes to Oller,⁸⁰ *La febre d'or* is undoubtedly one of the most comprehensive and important documentations of the city in this era. Oller's descriptions of the Liceu, the hippodrome of Can Tunis and the interiors of bourgeois homes captures the rapid progress and the rise of an industrial bourgeoisie in a city that a mere 150 years previously had been stripped of its historic rights and privileges in the Ley de Nueva Planta in 1714 and truly came to symbolise the changes brought about the shift in economic fortunes in the city of Barcelona.

LATTER-DAY LICEU: EDUARDO MENDOZA'S *LA CIUDAD DE LOS PRODIGIOS* AND CARLOS RUIZ ZAFÓN'S *LA SOMBRA DEL VIENTO*

Traces of Oller's attention to detail, and even his storyline, can be found in Eduardo Mendoza's mock-historical Barcelona 1986 epic *La ciudad de los prodigios* (The City of Marvels); a book that seeks to provide a panoramic vision of Barcelona in the period between the Universal Expositions of 1888 and 1929, through the description of the social ascent of *parvenu* Onofre Bouvila, whose ruthlessness and more importantly, his economic savvy propels him from poverty to become one of the city's most important men. Mendoza's story contrasts the economic situations in various parts of the city; Mendoza describes the penurious situation of the workers for the 1929 exposition who lived in 'casas realquiladas' (houses whose rooms were rented out to entire families)

⁸⁰ Margarida Casacuberta, Marina Gustà (eds.), *Narrativa urbana: La construcción literaria de Barcelona* p. 25.

and shanty towns on the edge of the exposition site at Montjuïc, while the protagonist meticulously and expensively reconstructs a large mansion in the prestigious Zona Alta area of the city, echoing the Foix's families viewing of Barcelona from the Giró mansion in *La febre d'or*. However, the appearance of the Liceu in *La ciudad de los prodigios* is once again as a representation of upper-class Barcelona society, and Mendoza focuses on how the organisational and financial structure of the Liceu could be manipulated in order to confer prestige on those who could afford it. Crime lord Humberto Figa i Morera is from a humble Raval background, but has risen through the criminal ranks to great wealth, and uses his ill-gotten money to purchase a box at the Liceu, thereby distancing himself from his previous criminal life and ingratiating himself into Barcelona society. Like his contemporaries described in the novel, Figa i Morera's use of the box is largely societal, rather than musical, in common with the mores of the time. He invites the son of his former adversary, Nicolau Canals i Rataplan, to the family's box at the Liceu ostensibly to see the première of *Otello* (a particularly choice background given the opera's themes of multiplicity and deception), but in reality the motive behind his invitation is to introduce Nicolau to his daughter, Margarita, thus referring to McDonogh's description of the importance of the Liceu box in the courtship of high society debutantes in *Good Families of Barcelona*. Mendoza also makes reference to the close-knit nature of the Liceu; Nicolau must ask other theatre patrons which of the boxes belongs to his father's murderer in order to gain entry. Figa i Morera's wife insists that the Liceu must seem provincial to Nicolau, who grew up in exile in France, here reflecting the 19th-century obsession of *barcelonins* with emulating styles, fashions and customs from Paris that features heavily in *La febre d'or*. Again, the artistic function of the Liceu is relegated to second position behind its function in society; Figa i Morera

invited Nicolau not really out of a love for opera, but in order to impress the young man for his own ends.

As previously noted, the artistic programme of the Liceu is often subsumed beneath its greater social importance, and as such when a character is interested in the Liceu for its musical or operatic content, it appears as somewhat of a novelty. In the case of Carlos Ruiz Zafón's publications *La sombra del viento* (The Shadow of the Wind, 2006) and *El juego del ángel* (The Angel's Game, 2008), the Liceu appears briefly within the larger dramatically gothic and forsaken context of the Raval, but Ruiz Zafón follows the canonical treatment of the theatre as a symbol of the moneyed classes; an island of civilisation in the midst of the miasma. However, in *El juego del ángel* an exception is made of Pedro Vidal, who is the scion of a fabulously wealthy entrepreneur and friend to the protagonist of the novel. As befits the son of a Pedralbes-dwelling tycoon, Vidal often attends the Liceu in the family box, but eschewing the 'traditional' Liceu activity of social strategy seen in *La febre d'or* and *La ciudad de los prodigios*, he prefers to indulge his love for music, marking him out to the reader as an atypical *liceísta*, and as such, a remarkable person within the framework of the novel. In Ruiz Zafón's 1999 novel *Marina*, the protagonists are involved in a fire in a large, sumptuous theatre that is completely gutted by the event: given that Zafón clearly sites the theatres close to La Rambla, amongst alleyways, it is possibly to conclude that the sumptuous theatre mentioned is a thinly-disguised Liceu. The commercial success of Ruiz Zafón's novels may well be down to his very precise location of the action in real locations using landmarks such as the Liceu and Plaça Catalunya as anchors for his imagined Barcelona, creating settings that are, if not real, then at least recognisably geographically contextualised. Given the financial success of *La sombra del viento*, Ruiz Zafón's publishers organised a gala presentation of his following book, *El juego del ángel*, at the

Liceu. Indeed, the themed tours of Barcelona that take in the semi-fictional routes taken by the characters of his books finish in front of the Liceu.

MODERN PSYCHOGEOGRAPHIES: LLUÏSA CUNILLÉ'S MAP OF SHADOWS

Although the novels of Mendoza and Ruiz Zafón are contemporary, the Barcelona they describe is definitively historical and imagined. The relative dearth of modern writing about the Liceu reflects the difficulties of writing about Barcelona itself, a constant in Spanish and Catalan writing. Concrete descriptions of the city have remained elusive, partly due to Barcelona's weakness for transformative macroprojects that seek to project the city to the forefront of European visibility. From the 1888 and 1929 Universal Expositions to the 1992 Olympics and 2004 Forum of Cultures, Barcelona appears to continually renovate and refurbish itself for external consumption by tourists and business, both internal and external. Given this continual recalibration of the urban fabric towards a more and more, and arguably imposed, post-modern aesthetic, Sharon Feldman argues that writers and dramatists have resorted to what she calls 'psychogeographies',⁸¹ fragmented, highly personal representations of the city that explore the writer's own urban experience as a way of depicting and relating to facets of Barcelona and its buildings in literature and theatre.

With this existing literary tradition in mind, Gràcia's alternative theatre Sala Beckett created a season of works called *L'acció té lloc a Barcelona* ('The action takes place in Barcelona'), the remit of which was to commission works that revisited depictions of the city through various prisms, to create a theatrical vision that reflected, and was rooted in, the current state of the city, as well as assessing the status of

⁸¹ Sharon G. Feldman, 'Catalunya Invisible: Contemporary Drama in Barcelona', *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies*, 6 (2002) 269-287 (p. 276).

barcelonisme. *Barcelonisme* may be considered a literary attitude that embraces (to varying degrees) ideals such as utopianism, Catalanism, and *noucentisme* with its focus as the city of Barcelona and the experience of its social and physical spheres. In a modern incarnation, *barcelonisme* encompasses a range of ambiguous feelings between citizen and Barcelona; affection for the city tempered by dissatisfaction with what is considered an excessive hunger for tourist money and international projection on part of the Ajuntament de Barcelona (City Council).

During this period of the late 1990s and mid-2000s, the author of *Barcelona, mapa d'ombres* (Barcelona, Map of Shadows), Lluïsa Cunillé came to prominence, and her critically-acclaimed work and prolific output define her as one of the most well-known and in-demand dramatists in Catalonia. Her work is known for what might be termed 'minimalist hyperreality', occupying what Sharon Feldman calls 'an unsettling, static universe, where time does not appear to advance and the characters are suspended in an interminably continuous present, in a vaporous and indeterminate urban landscape that seems disquietingly devoid of action'.⁸² Cunillé's demandingly minimalist style evades succinct qualification and as such, has proved polemical, with critics divided between those that find her work inert and pointless, and those who marvel in the concision of her style. Fellow playwright Carles Batlle noted her ability to portray the 'grey and terrible patina of daily life in society',⁸³ while her mentor José Sanchis Sinisterra marvelled in the 'paradoxical banality of the dialogues',⁸⁴ and Marcos Ordóñez (who coined the term 'Cunillèlândia' to describe the framework Cunillé

⁸² Sharon G. Feldman, 'The Sala Beckett and the Zero Degree of Theatricality - From Lluïsa Cunillé to Carles Batlle', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 17,3 (2007), 370-84 (p. 378).

⁸³ Carles Batlle i Jordà, 'Contemporary Catalan Theatre: Between the Desert and the Promised Land', trans. by Richard Mansell, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 17,3 (2007), 416-24 (p. 418).

⁸⁴ 'Paradoxal banalitat dels diàlegs', José Sanchis Sinisterra, quoted in Cunillé, *Accident* (Barcelona: Institut del Teatre, 1996), pp. 7-8.

operates in)⁸⁵ captures something of the peculiarity of Cunillé's work: 'we know we are there, again, because we recognise its pattern of light and shadow (always imprecise, always changing), the recurring places: its interstitial passageways'.⁸⁶

Lluïsa Cunillé's contribution to the Sala Beckett's season of *barcelonista* works, *Barcelona, mapa d'ombres* follows an aging couple that live in an old-fashioned, claustrophobic flat typical of the Eixample area of Barcelona who attempt to force their tenants to leave in order to spend time alone together before the imminent death of the husband. The play advances through a series of direct dialogues involving either the characters of 'Husband' or 'Wife' (referred to as Ell or Ella in the original, but translated as Husband and Wife here for the sake of clarity) and the relationship they have with their tenants, and to the outside world.

In the first instance, 'Husband' and his tenant 'Woman' (Dona in the original), the former a doorman at the Gran Teatre del Liceu, the latter a middle-aged French teacher, discuss her relationship to the city. In the second dialogue 'Wife' (who is married to Husband) and 'Young Man' talk of discontent amongst Spanish youth and their lack of future (a strangely prescient moment given the current economic context of the early 2010s). In the third scene, in which Husband and 'Foreigner' talk about the latter's low-paid job and pregnancy by Husband, exemplifies the contentious relationship between Catalans and immigrant workers, while the fourth scene featuring Wife and her 'brother' Doctor returns to the theme of the city and its perceived loss of authenticity. The play ends with a final dialogue between Husband and Wife, in which they confess their deepest secrets to each other while cross-dressing; Wife admits that her 'brother'

⁸⁵ Feldman, 'Catalunya Invisible', p. 275.

⁸⁶ 'Sabem que som allí, altre cop, perquè reconeixem les seves llums i ombres (sempre imprecises, sempre canviants), els seus llocs recurrents: les zones de pas, els intersticis', Marcus Ordóñez, 'Aprenguí a estimar la tònica', *Avui*, 23 March 1998, p. 43.

is in fact her son from an incestuous relationship with her father, and Husband admits to starting the 1994 fire at the Liceu with the power of his mind.

The initial dialogue between Husband and Woman immediately introduces the theme of *barcelonisme* as a central tenet of the play; through Woman Cunillé channels the citizens' worries about the constant and ubiquitous speculation prevalent in the city. Having been forced to move around the city to escape the scourge of joggers, here considered the harbingers of imminent speculation and development, Woman harks back to a more vital city; less sanitised to European and tourist requirements and standards. Through Woman, Cunillé represents the citizens' ambiguous reaction to Barcelona's success and their dissatisfaction with the near-continuous works carried out in the name of improving the city. However, despite the macroprojects wreaked upon Barcelona by the City Council, Woman finds that she is inevitably drawn back to the city, underlining the fundamental ambivalence *barcelonisme* entails. Through Woman Cunillé is able to express a highly-intelligent, inquisitive version of *barcelonisme*, and uses Woman to question the somewhat hackneyed relationship between the citizens and those monuments chosen to embody Barcelona. When asked by Husband whether she likes the Sagrada Família, she deftly inverts the question:

Perhaps the question should be the other way round. Does the Sagrada Família like us? If I were the Sagrada Família I'd be screaming seeing everything that's around me.⁸⁷

Husband's non-plussed reaction to her comment immediately invites the *barceloní* to consider the effect of the unending construction on the city from the perspective of the

⁸⁷ 'La pregunta potser hauria de ser a l'inrevés. Li agradem nosaltres a la Sagrada Família? Si jo fos la Sagrada Família també em posaria a cridar veient tot el que hi ha al meu voltant', Lluïsa Cunillé and Pau Miró, *Barcelona, mapa d'ombres/Plou a Barcelona*, En Cartell, 8 (Barcelona: Re&Ma, 2004), p. 17.

city itself, instead of endorsing their own personal reaction.

Woman's inquisitiveness around her surroundings extends to the Liceu; when Husband describes his job as doorman at the Liceu, Woman puts it to him that as a doorman, he must know who burnt the Liceu down. Sensing Husband's 'guilt', she parries Husband's evasive answer of 'I wasn't there that day'⁸⁸ with 'Isn't it a bit strange that nobody was there that day?'⁸⁹ In doing so, Woman questions the commonly accepted 'theory' that the fire at the Liceu was an accident, started by a spark in the auditorium, again inviting the spectator to reconsider the generally accepted cause of the fire and therefore re-evaluate their relationship to the building before and after the fire. In order to carry this out Cunillé constructs a spectrum of opinion that goes beyond the narrative conventions by which the Liceu is normally represented, which then acts as a reappraisal of the citizens' relationship with the theatre since its re-opening in 1999. Leaving behind the most commonly found literary view of the building as a representation of elitism and bourgeois values Cunillé draws attention to the life behind the façade of the Liceu to re-evaluate the citizens' rapport with the theatre by depicting the various types of relationships of the characters of Wife, Husband and Doctor with the Liceu.

Wife represents the more typical, expected relationship found in literature; she is an opera lover and met Husband at the Liceu. Even though she has not attended the opera for some time, she still listens to opera on the radio, as illustrated by the intermittent playing of *La Bohème* throughout the piece. The opera acts as a background to the play, with snatches of the music heard or sung by some of the characters of the opera. However, despite the apparent simplicity of Wife's character, she comes to partly

⁸⁸ 'Jo no hi era aquell dia' Cunillé, *Barcelona, mapa d'ombres*, p. 13.

⁸⁹ 'No és una mica estrany que ningú hi fos aquell dia?', *ibid.*

embody the characters of *La Bohème* and replicates the actions of Mimì and Rodolfo in the play; like Mimì, she sings the Young Man to sleep, and in a role change that will become something of a trend throughout the play, she takes on the role of Rodolfo and confesses Husband's illness to 'Doctor', an action which then converts Husband into Mimì.

Husband's relationship to the Liceu in *Barcelona, mapa d'ombres* is more overtly disjointed than Wife's subtly drawn fragmentation. Although he has worked at the Liceu as a doorman for many years, he admits to his tenant Foreigner that he has never seen an opera in its entirety, and only 'recognises' *La Bohème* on the radio because Wife told him that it would be playing that evening. Furthermore, he also confides to her that he used to hide in the wardrobe section and masquerade in dresses, blurring the boundaries of his identity, both sexually and culturally; the contrast between the outward conservatism of Wife's motives for going to the Liceu and Husband's use of the wardrobe department to create multiple, fleeting identities that reflect Cunillé's incomplete, yet coherent vision of the city and its monuments.

The zenith of Husband's atypical relationship with the Liceu is the confession that he started the fire that gutted the theatre in 1994. As he argues:

Everyone said that there needed to be a new Liceu, and every day that passed I heard more people saying, 'I wish it'd burn down so they can build a new, bigger, Liceu'. And in the end I did it. I burnt it down.⁹⁰

In doing so, Husband seems to be responding to the wishes of *vox populi* and, in making Husband merely the instrument of citizens' will, Cunillé invites the spectators to re-evaluate their own relationship to monuments considered emblematic to Barcelona.

⁹⁰ 'Tothom deia que feia falta un nou Liceu, cada dia que passava sentia dir a més gent que tant de bo es cremés per fer-ne un de nou i de més gros. I al final ho vaig fer jo. El vaig cremar jo', *ibid.*, p. 65.

Like the earlier discussion of the Sagrada Família between Woman and Husband, Cunillé illustrates the complex relationship between citizen and environment through a discussion between Wife and Doctor:

Wife: 'Would you come to the Liceu with me?

Doctor: On one condition.

W: What?

D: That afterwards we'd burn it down.

W: The Liceu?

D: The thing is they'd soon build another one so similar to the second that people would forget the first one. No, we'd have to burn something else?

W: Like what?

D: The Catalan Music Palace, for example. And don't think we'd stop there.

W: No?

D: Afterwards we could burn...the modern art museum.

W: Why the modern art museum?

D: That way no one would think we had musical prejudices

W: And after that what could we burn?

D: If by this point no one has stopped us, as I suspect, there are some skyscrapers that would burn very nicely. Without forgetting Barça's stadium, of course.

W: And the Sagrada Família?

D: It's not finished, but we could also torch it. And Plaça Catalunya, of course. In fact, Plaça Catalunya should be burnt every afternoon as

another lure for the tourists that come up La Rambla...'⁹¹

Doctor's suggestion of torching various buildings synonymous with Barcelona in order to recover some of the 'authenticity' and 'vitality' that Woman longs for acts as a diatribe against the superficial consumption of Barcelona's monuments, and like Woman, Doctor sees the holds the city authorities responsible for attempting to transform the marginal, yet apparently authentic area of the Raval into something more tourist-friendly. Nevertheless, Doctor admits that the city's reaction to his theoretical pyromania against the Liceu would be similar to that of the 1994 fire; one of horror. In contrast to the other monuments to consumerism that the Doctor earmarks for purging by fire, Cunillé seems to argue that the Liceu has already survived a modern trial by fire, and as such, has earned a legitimate place as such a fixture of Barcelona culture and life, but also that the Liceu is not responsible for the perceived loss of 'authenticity' of the Raval, having been an integral, if incongruous part of the area since the mid-nineteenth century.

Set amongst the tenuous and ephemeral Barcelona that remains unseen in

⁹¹ W: Vindries al Liceu amb mi?

D: Amb una sola condició.

W: Quina?

D: Que després el creméssim tots dos.

W: El Liceu?

D: El que passa és que aviat n'aixequeriem un altre tan idèntic al segon que fes oblidar fins i tot el primer. No. Hauríem de cremar una altre cosa.

W: Què...?

D: El Palau de la Música, per exemple. I no et pensis que ens aturàriem aquí.

W: Ah no?

D: Després podríem cremar... el MACBA.

W: Per què el MACBA?

D: Així ningú no pensarà que tenim prejudicis musicals.

W: I després què podríem cremar?

D: Si a aquestes alçades ningú no ens ha aturat com jo sospito, hi ha uns quants gratacels vells i nous de trinca que també cremarien força bé. Sense oblidar el camp del Barça, és clar.

W: I la Sagrada Família?

D: No està acabada, però també la podríem cremar. I la plaça de Catalunya naturalment, de fet la plaça de Catalunya s'hauria de cremar cada tarda com un reclam més per als turistes que puguen de les Rambles.

Ibid., p. 49.

Barcelona, mapa d'ombres, the Liceu forms part of Cunillé's greyscale city – gone are the dazzling lights and 'strings of camellias' of Oller and de Amicis's visions to be replaced by a more sombre, down-to-earth institution. *Barcelona, mapa d'ombres* retains Cunillé's rejection of the self-scrutiny of so-called postmodern theatre via the aforementioned medium of 'paradoxical banality', thus preserving the chiaroscuro and sense of stasis typical of her dialogues and set. On this occasion, however, *Barcelona, mapa d'ombres* introduces the background of a polychromatic, ostentatiously 21st-century metropolis that is only ever referred to in the play. This contrast between the pretensions of Barcelona and the apparent triviality of the dialogues in *Barcelona, mapa d'ombres* mirrors the intimate and collective experiences of the audience, whose own psychogeographies of Barcelona may be as fragmented as those depicted by Cunillé. She is nevertheless able to use these disjointed images to explore the ambivalent values of *barcelonisme* with an audience that will almost certainly be able to connect with her concepts. The delicate combination of contrasted micro- and macro-narratives and fragmentation provides a space for Cunillé to set the narrative nodes of they play between the realistic and the absurd; she unsensationally combines themes of incest, transvestism and telekinesis against a backdrop of the immobile, stagnant atmosphere of the Husband and Wife's flat.

It is precisely this background that throws the polished projection of Barcelona's monuments (including the Liceu) into sharp relief; the polychromatic sheen of the presentation of the city is stripped away to allow discussion of the implications of the city's obsession with novelty and postmodernity, and the true relevance of single (and indeed singular) buildings to the citizens. Lluïsa Cunillé seems to call the audience to reclaim their city, to re-humanise the monuments that have made Barcelona famous by submitting these very landmarks to purification by fire. In doing so, she removes

consideration of emblematic buildings and the cityscape from the personal imaginary that is conceived as a result of the instability of the urban landscape, and restores them to the literary sphere for discussion. By asking the spectators to imagine themselves in the place of the Sagrada Família, or asking who might have set fire to the Liceu, Cunillé is altering the established mode of relating to these buildings and encouraging the spectator to strip away their existing prejudices and opinions. Having restored the Liceu to a human scale, she invites the audience to reconsider their vision of the city within their own urban narrative, and to reappraise the Liceu in order to definitively include it as a modern, relevant part of their own psychogeography. Lluïsa Cunillé's treatment of the theatre is likely one of the most accomplished, and most thorough reconsiderations of the role of the Liceu (and by extension, of the institutions of culture that have been erected in Barcelona and their cultural and social impact and importance, since the turn of the century). Director Ventura Pons's 2007 film version, starring Catalan acting veterans Núria Espert, Rosa Maria Sardà and Josep Maria Pou, managed to transmit some of the claustrophobic nature of the play with its sombre atmosphere, subdued lighting, lack of natural sunlight and lugubrious performances against the backdrop of an old-fashioned, dark set that reflects the untold reason for the couple's wish to be alone.

AN INSIDE AND OUTSIDE VIEW OF THE LICEU: OTHER MODERN THEATRE

It is worth mentioning two more theatrical works that look at the Liceu and the Raval from the point of view of an outsider – as a citizen who is not 'inside' the cultural constructs of the Liceu or the Raval, and is not necessarily a consumer of the cultural products on offer. This may be down to a lack of knowledge about the production, or the feeling that the Liceu is an irrelevant cultural institution to the citizen, or due to social

exclusion. La Cubana's production of *Una nit d'òpera* (A Night at the Opera, 2001) and Pau Miró's *Plou a Barcelona* (It's Raining in Barcelona, 2006) both explore the concept of cultural institutions from an 'external' point of view: these productions reflect those people who do not have access to the Liceu (or indeed, Barcelona culture) that Edmondo de Amicis, Gil Foix, or Husband have had because of their connections, prestige, or control of the Liceu's fate.

Far from Cunillé's heavy tone, Barcelona-based theatre company La Cubana's *Una nit d'òpera* set out to deconstruct the stereotypes and clichés associated with opera. From the outset La Cubana were able to disorientate their viewers by welcoming them not through the Teatre Tívoli's main entrance, but rather telling them that that entrance was for those (supposedly more expensive) tickets that were red, and funnelling the attendees down a side entrance into the auditorium. The production referenced the Liceu architecturally by featuring an undoubtedly similar cupola in the set design, as well as featuring a cast of faux-divas and larger-than-life back-of-house characters whose names were combinations of major players in the theatre and opera scene of the time (Delgado notes Montserrat Batallé, for example, referencing Caballé).⁹² The performance revolves around the staging of *Aïda* at the so-called 'Gran Teatre de l'Òpera', but the opera becomes almost incidental to the action on stage, as the attention of the audience is drawn to see the backstage workings of the theatre. Much of the charm of the production comes from the spectacle behind the curtain, with a cast of almost Almodóvarian characters making 'necessary sacrifices to the greater glory of opera' and indulging in extravagant hysterics backstage.⁹³ La Cubana thus invites the spectator to see a perhaps often-imagined, but infrequently-seen aspect of theatre

⁹² Maria M. Delgado, *'Other' Spanish Theatres: Erasure and Inscription on the Twentieth-Century Spanish Stage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 265.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

production, enabling the public to witness the scandalous behaviour of the protagonists, in addition to providing an insight into the minutiae of stage design, undermining the seriousness of the illusion that opera seeks to create, and allowing a much more human dimension to filter out. As Maria Delgado notes, *Una nit d'òpera's* gentle mockery of the opera world differs from the sharp acerbic humour of previous La Cubana works in that their deconstruction of opera, the Liceu and its associated trappings was 'strangely affectionate towards what it demolishes'.⁹⁴ However, the fact that La Cubana was able to make a production that was so heavily self-referential in a Barcelona context is a measure of what the opera house and the wider theatre context means to the city and the importance and responsibility borne by those who are in charge of them: amongst the fanciful and extravagant parodies on stage was a figure that combined two of the most important cultural managers of the time: Daniel Matabosch, which is postulated as a mixture of Daniel Martínez, the then-head of theatre management company Focus and Joan Matabosch.⁹⁵ These references must have been considered sufficiently common to the average Cubana-goer for them to be able to make the connection between the theatre producers, indicating the importance of cultural managers and the cultural construct in wider Barcelona society.

In contrast to La Cubana's lively, ironic and colourful treatment of the operatic world and the flights of fantasy and shifting identity in *Barcelona, mapa d'ombres, Plou a Barcelona* (It's raining in Barcelona) by Pau Miró presents a Barcelona that is similar to Cunillé's greyscale city, but moves the minimalist action from the superficially comfortable, middle-class apartments of the Eixample to the poverty of a small flat in the deprived Raval district. Recalling the *Barcelona, mapa d'ombres* scene in which

⁹⁴ Kramer, quoted in Delgado, *'Other' Spanish Theatres*, p. 270.

⁹⁵ Delgado, *'Other' Spanish Theatres*, p. 265.

Doctor and Woman imagine burning down the Liceu and the MACBA modern art museum as if such actions would return the Raval to its previously 'authentic' character; the question of the area's identity and the role of the Liceu and other cultural institutions within the Raval (to be discussed in greater depth in the following chapter) becomes a central tenet of Miró's play, which examines the more seedy side to life in a city that posits itself as a forward-thinking, contemporary, cultural hub.

Following the story of prostitute Lali (a diminutive of the name of one of the city's patron saints, Saint Eulàlia), her pimp Carlos and regular client David, Miró sets the interrelations of the protagonists definitively in post-Olympic Raval; contrasting the squalid surroundings Lali works in and her attempt to become, as she calls it, 'normal'. Lali's attempts to become 'normal' are exemplified in her wish to visit the cultural institutions and museums that are close to and contrast with her decrepit living space. This will to educate herself stands in opposition to Carlos's incessant craving for corporate food – McDonald's and Pans & Company are frequently referred to. His food wrappers, symbolic of the globalism and governmental interventionism (part of the City Council's policy of the 'esponjament' – cleaning up – of the Raval) encroaching in on one of Barcelona's most controversial districts, whose historically licentious character has attracted pleasure-seekers for decades (as noted by, amongst others, Jean Genet in *A Thief's Diary*, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán in his police novels and Josep Maria de Sagarra in *Vida Privada [Private Life]*). This perceived 'authentic' character of the Raval has been eroded by the growth of cultural industries and the associated young, relatively wealthy demographic of cultural consumers which has been attracted to the Raval largely due to council intervention in the form of the construction of purpose-built facilities for the creation and consumption of a post-modern cultural product. The

Liceu stands at the heart of this venture – a symbol of its past and an emblem of the new construction and regeneration that its rebuilding in the mid 1990s heralded.

CONCLUSION

Including the Liceu in this orgy of gentrification and globalisation of the Raval, however, seems a little unfair: the reconstruction of the theatre from 1994 to 1999 may have provided some of the impetus for the regeneration of the area, but Barcelona's own thirst for modernity is largely responsible for projects such as the slum clearance undertaken to construct the MACBA and the Rambla del Raval. In *Barcelona, mapa d'ombres* the Doctor's insinuation that burning the Liceu down again would only result in another reconstruction is indicative of the theatre's importance and gives a sense of its duration.

Having occupied the corner of La Rambla and carrer Sant Pau for over 150 years, the Liceu has arguably earned its place in the Raval as an authentic cultural installation that is both physically and psychogeographically part of the area, and although an edifice that is so emblematic of the aristocracy may seem incongruous on the edge of an area so maligned for its down-and-out reputation, Marvin Carlson notes that theatres, given their status as representations of reality, are often sited in places on the edges of a city's imaginary. The Globe Theatre was constructed on the then-peripheral south bank of the Thames, but the position of the Liceu is unusual in that it combines a central location next to an area of economic deprivation in the heart of Barcelona. Like many civic buildings in Spanish cities, the Liceu was built on the site of an old church, and occupies a site that is at once prestigious and marginal; the main entrance faces onto, arguably, the most famous street in Spain, while the secondary entrance faces onto a dark, narrow street famed as the territory of street-walkers and other peripheral

characters. The superficial incongruence of this siting will be explored in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 2: THE LICEU AND THE RAVAL: HISTORICAL LOCATION AND CULTURAL LANDMARK

‘Architecture is always dream and function, expression of a utopia and instrument of a convenience.’⁹⁶

Barthès’s comment in reference to the Eiffel Tower is equally applicable to the Gran Teatre del Liceu: the section ‘From the *Galliner* to the *Llotja*’ in the previous chapter discusses how the building has functioned as the crystallisation of a class’s desires and will in a moment in time (pp. 40-43), but this chapter will seek to investigate the political and social circumstances that came together to allow the creation of a building that represented the spirit of the time and the bourgeoisie that captured it. In contrast to the previous chapter, this chapter will focus on the Liceu’s spatial relationship to the area in which it stands (the Raval), and will attempt to analyse the significance of its location both in a marginal area and on a main historical artery (La Rambla). The architecture of the Liceu also merits a special mention; although relatively modest in taste, it is profoundly important as a manifestation of the economic, social and architectural circumstances of the age in which it was conceived, and as such, is a reflection of the mores of the age, and of the society that pushed for the construction of the building.

In addition, the privately-funded nature of the Liceu sets it apart from other contemporaneous theatres (most importantly, Madrid’s Teatro Real) in that the private funding shaped both the form and the function of the building: a construction process

⁹⁶ Roland Barthès, *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1979), p. 6.

which was arguably an important factor in the gestation of *modernisme* architecture in the decades following the construction of the Liceu.

Within the urban context of the Liceu special mention will be given to the economic changes of the Raval, and the transition from its historic function as home for Barcelona's 'undesirable' institutions. Furthermore, from the 1850s onwards, it has been the focus of the city's incipient industrialisation up to its conversion to a cultural, touristic and service economy. Given the contrast between the poverty of the Raval and the elite connotations of the Liceu, this chapter will attempt to analyse the relationship between the two in urbanistic and demographic terms, as well as determine the place of the Liceu within modern-day Raval in terms of its physical location and its place in the shared image thereof.

In a wider geographical context of Barcelona, the Liceu will be discussed in relation to other theatres in the city, and whether the physical location and conditions of inception of these institutions plays a role in the public opinion of them given what we know about the Liceu. Likewise, a brief comparison of the Liceu and its Madrid contemporary, the Teatro Real, will be made as the latter provides a counterpoint both in terms of the capital's theatre scene, in addition to having been constructed in quite a different manner. The origins, construction, remit and intended audience are all quite different from those of the Liceu, and there is a rivalry between the very different locations, histories and remits of two world-class opera houses in culturally competitive cities.

GROWTH AND WEALTH: THE CREATION OF 19TH-CENTURY BARCELONA

The latter half of the 19th century saw the manifestation of the new wealth and importance of Barcelona in the construction of three buildings that came to symbolise

the social, physical and economic changes in the city that had come about through the financial growth generated by Catalonia's industrialisation in the early to mid 1800s. These were the reconstruction of Barcelona University, the Gran Teatre del Liceu and the completion of the façade of the cathedral.

In the first instance, in 1837 the University of Barcelona – which had been closed by the Bourbons following the War of the Spanish Succession as part of the 1714 Nueva Planta decrees that removed many of Catalonia's historic privileges – returned from its exile in the provincial town of Cervera, and moved to the Carmelite convent in the Raval; a home it quickly outgrew. As such, architect Elies Rogent was assigned the task of designing a new home for Catalonia's only university making use of a plot just beyond the city walls in what had previously been farmland, thus symbolising the restoration of the university and a visible endorsement of the expansion of the city into the fields and market gardens between Barcelona and its outlying towns to form the district nowadays known as the Eixample (Catalan for 'extension'). Construction on the new building on today's Plaça Universitat started in 1862, but was not finished until 1881, although classes were imparted in the building from 1874 onwards.⁹⁷

The second of these constructions (although third chronologically) is the façade of the Cathedral of Santa Creu and Santa Eulàlia (1882-1890) – financed almost exclusively by banker Manuel Girona i Arafel and his siblings, and designed by Josep Oriol Mestres (coincidentally one of the architects of the Liceu) for the 1888 Universal Exposition. The previous façade had been in an austere, squat Catalan Romanesque style, but with the occasion of the Universal Exposition and the opportunity to display the city as a modern European metropolis, Girona i Arafel and his family paid for an

⁹⁷ From the University of Barcelona website: <
http://www.ub.edu/web/ub/ca/universitat/coneix_la_ub/historia/Historia.html> [accessed 27 August 2013].

exuberantly neo-gothic façade as a 'donation' to the city. As would come to be a frequent occurrence in Barcelona, wealthy Catalan industrialists often exhibited their power and civic intentions for the betterment of the city. In this case, however, these intentions were manifested in a religious symbol (which is likely to be more linked to the building's importance as a central node of high visibility rather than out of any commitment to the Catholic church in the city), rather than the secular social symbols, like the Liceu that preceded it.

Although the cathedral and the university are singular manifestations of how the social elite of the time came to shape the city physically, I shall concentrate on the Gran Teatre del Liceu as potentially the most symbolic of these monuments in terms of their representative power of the bourgeoisie in the middle of the 19th century. This is not to say that Elias Rogent's (re)construction of the university or Mestres's cathedral façade are not representative of their time, but the construction of the Liceu is arguably the most zeitgeist of the three, for it embodied the Barcelona version of the opera house, a building that personified the civic values of the late Enlightenment.

In order to understand the Liceu's importance to Barcelona, it is necessary to look beyond its status as a 'universalised' symbol of a specific set of cultural and wealth values associated with the rise of the industrial bourgeoisie in Barcelona, to the effect and influence it has had on its location in the Raval, and how the relationship to its immediate surroundings has changed as the latter has evolved from industrial suburb (1850-1880) to slum (1880-1980) and latterly to cultural hub (1980-today). As such, I will mention the historic context of the Raval and La Rambla, possibly Barcelona's most famous street, and most obvious historical thoroughfare.

HISTORICAL LOCATIONS: SPACE, ECONOMICS AND POLITICS

The final location of the Gran Teatre del Liceu was influenced by a variety of issues that reflect the overarching political circumstances of the period, as well as various economical factors that left their mark on the building. Nevertheless, the historical developments of theatre siting are relevant, and the Liceu in fact presents an intersection between Greco-Roman and Renaissance trends in this respect. Marvin Carlson notes that Renaissance and Baroque theatres were frequently sited at the edges or the outskirts of major cities in order to avoid the city's planning and performance requirements, given society's historical ambiguity towards the morality associated with theatre. These locations and the ambivalence towards theatre in this period can be evidenced by the examples of the Globe and the Rose (amongst others in London):

The public theatres of Greece and Rome were major civic monuments, which held prominent positions in the urban text. By contrast, the first theatres of Paris and London were erected not properly speaking within this text at all, but clearly on its margins, in locations both precarious and ambiguous. There is no topographical justification for this marginality, as there was with Greek theatre, it is clearly a physical reflection of the social ambiguity and marginality of theatre itself.⁹⁸

However, Carlson goes on notes that theatres of the Enlightenment took their cues from Ancient Greece in their recuperation of the primal position of theatres in the city.

However, one should note the large, open nature of the theatres of antiquity; in Miletus and Taormina the theatres are sited on commanding promontories over the sea. In contrast, Enlightenment theatres came from the tradition that grew out of court theatre

⁹⁸ Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performances: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989) p. 68.

in Spain, France, Italy and Russia of smaller, more intimate venues that gradually expanded in size. Theatre culture of the 18th century depended largely on noble patronage; the theatres at Versailles, Potsdam and the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg illustrate the beginnings of theatre presence in cities, although almost exclusively in a private context. Private theatres for the royalty appeared in Spain in the late eighteenth century under the auspices of Charles III, who appointed French architect Jaime Marquet to construct theatres for the royal palaces at El Escorial, Aranjuez and El Pardo.⁹⁹ Here, it is worth noting the suburban nature of these theatres – while there were small, public theatres in European cities,¹⁰⁰ they were discreetly tucked into the surroundings. However, as the prestigious, exclusive court theatres shifted towards the centre of the city, they came to take on a larger, much more visible presence, and undertook a much grander relationship to the urban surroundings. Recalling the theatre as one of the principal nodes of the city, along with the agora/forum and the gymnasium/palaestra, Enlightenment architects were able to accord theatre the importance physical location that corresponded to its regained prestige amongst the nobility and royalty of the age.¹⁰¹ French architect and reviewer César Daly notes that the opera house stood alongside the cathedral and the railway station as icons of 19th-century European culture.¹⁰² Just as ever-grander cathedrals proliferated in Gothic and Renaissance cities, and later, cavernous railway stations arrived in the industrial cities

⁹⁹ Designation of the royal theatres as national monuments. Resolución de 30 de marzo de 1995, de la dirección general de patrimonio cultural de la Consejería de Educación y Cultura, por la que se incoa expediente de declaración de Bien de Interés Cultural con la categoría de Monumento a favor del Teatro Real Coliseo de Carlos III, en el municipio de San Lorenzo del Escorial, *Boletín Oficial del Estado*, 30 March 1995 <http://www.boe.es/aeboe/consultasbases_datos/doc.php?coleccion=indilex&id=1995/12043&txtlen=1126> [accessed 6 June 2011]

¹⁰⁰ Carlson, *Places of Performances*, p. 70.

¹⁰¹ This royal sponsorship of theatre is exemplified in Spain by the Teatro Real in Madrid, whose construction was commanded to be finished by Royal Order by Isabel II in 1850.

¹⁰² César Daly, 'Concours por le grand Opéra de Paris', *Revue générale de l'architecture et des travaux publics*, 19 (1861), 14-108 (pp. 80-81).

as symbols of technical and industrial innovation, a similar cultural competition took place with the opera houses in European cities. As a sign of a cohesive, educated, cultured élite, grand edifices were drawn up and combined with Enlightenment-era town-planning as part of larger plans for the re-orientation and sanitation of cities. An immensely expensive, monumental architecture was used to state the importance of theatre within the cityscape and to open up axial views of the new temple for the élites. These rational, deliberate and above all, engineered schemes stood in contrast to the perceived anarchy of the medieval city:

The narrow and torturous medieval streets, with overhanging structures and capricious widening and narrowings, suggested no connotations of subservience, or even tractability, but rather those of a stubborn individuality.¹⁰³

The 19th-century fashion for redesigning cities often contained a blueprint for a suitably grand opera house as a symbol of the growing standing and culture of a city, and examples abound. For example, Carlson cites the construction of the monumental Ringstrasse in Vienna as another imposition of European Enlightenment-era rationalism onto a more organic (i.e. chaotic) street plan.¹⁰⁴ The Ringstrasse created a circuitous salon for social visibility and mutual viewing, but also came to obviate the ‘un-Enlightened’ medieval centre of the city in bourgeois interrelations. Naturally, the new Wiener Staatsoper was conceded a place on this prestigious avenue but, due to the circular nature of the boulevard, was not necessarily given any kind of visual precedence over any other building on the Ringstrasse; something of a misfire in terms of using buildings to frame the opera house along monumental axes.

¹⁰³ Carlson, *Places of Performance*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁴ Carlson, *Places of Performance*, pp. 85-87.

Perhaps the grandest example of this enshrining of the opera house through urbanism is Opéra Garnier in Paris. Sited at the intersection of Avenue de l'Opéra and Boulevard des Capucines, and within the rationalist lines of Eugène Haussmann's 19th-century redevelopment of Paris, the Garnier opera house enjoys a direct sight-line to the Louvre (indicating the urbanistic importance and centrality of the palatial complex to Paris even post-Revolution), as well as proximity to the undoubtedly elite connotations of the Église de la Madeleine, Place Vendôme, la Bourse, and the Théâtre Nationale d'Opéra-Comique. The siting of the Garnier helped to redefine the area of Paris it was in (the old medieval plan of the 9th *arrondissement*), identifying it more with the upper bourgeoisie who were the theatre's patrons, and the class in ascendant control. As Carlson notes:

Such theatres (major ones), continue to be located in major squares or urban parks near the centres of large cities, but outside the main commercial areas and often near luxury urban housing or specialised shopping areas suitable for so elegant a neighbour.¹⁰⁵

This concentration of state, civic, cultural and religious institutions creates a high-prestige urban area due to their proximity and interrelations and is arguably a phenomenon present in most European capitals. In London the organs of power are in the area of Whitehall, Westminster and St. James; in Paris the adjacent 2nd and 8th *arrondissements* are home to the previously mentioned monuments. In Madrid (a city that in some ways has been more 'planned' than Barcelona), we find an historical 'axis' of state power from the Palacio Real to the Paseo del Prado consisting of the calle Mayor and carrera San Jerónimo, home to royal residences and government organs.

¹⁰⁵ Carlson, *Places of Performances*, p. 88.

In Barcelona, however, the ‘power cluster’ of buildings is incohesive and unconnected; the Roman-era forum of plaça Sant Jaume (the small, rectangular square in the middle of a long, transversal street on the map on the following page) is home to the organs of the Ajuntament (City Council) and Generalitat (Catalan government) and is connected to the cathedral along carrer del Bisbe, a short distance away to the north-west. These government buildings are then connected to the Liceu and La Rambla, by carrer Ferran, a 19th-century artery cut through the medieval street plan (the transversal street mentioned above). Other symbols of power are then scattered across the historical centre: the University, before its exile to Cervera, was situated across the other side of La Rambla on carrer Carme and the Llotja, Barcelona’s stock market, and the *Delegación del Gobierno*, Madrid’s representative in Barcelona, are on Pla de Palau, at the edge of the pre-Eixample walled city near the port (labelled on the map near the Baluard de Migdia).¹⁰⁶

This lack of urban cohesion could be due in part to the status of Barcelona after the Nueva Planta declarations in 1714, stripping Catalonia of its historic rights and privileges. The organs of Catalan government were stripped of their power, and Barcelona was effectively controlled from the Ciutadella fortress.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Francisco Coello, *Barcelona*, 1862 <Available at <http://cartotecadigital.icc.cat/u/?catalunya,1830>> [accessed 21 July 2011]

¹⁰⁷ The Nueva Planta decrees and the construction of the Ciutadella fortress are traumatic events in Barcelona’s history as a manifestation of top-down centralist power and repression. The tricentenary of these is commemorated in 2014. More information can be found in Jaume Sobrequés i Callicó’s *History of Catalonia* (Barcelona: Editorial Base, 2007) and Jan Read’s *The Catalans* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978). The Nueva Planta decrees can be viewed digitally at <www.llibrevell.cat/nueva-planta> [accessed 27 August 2013]

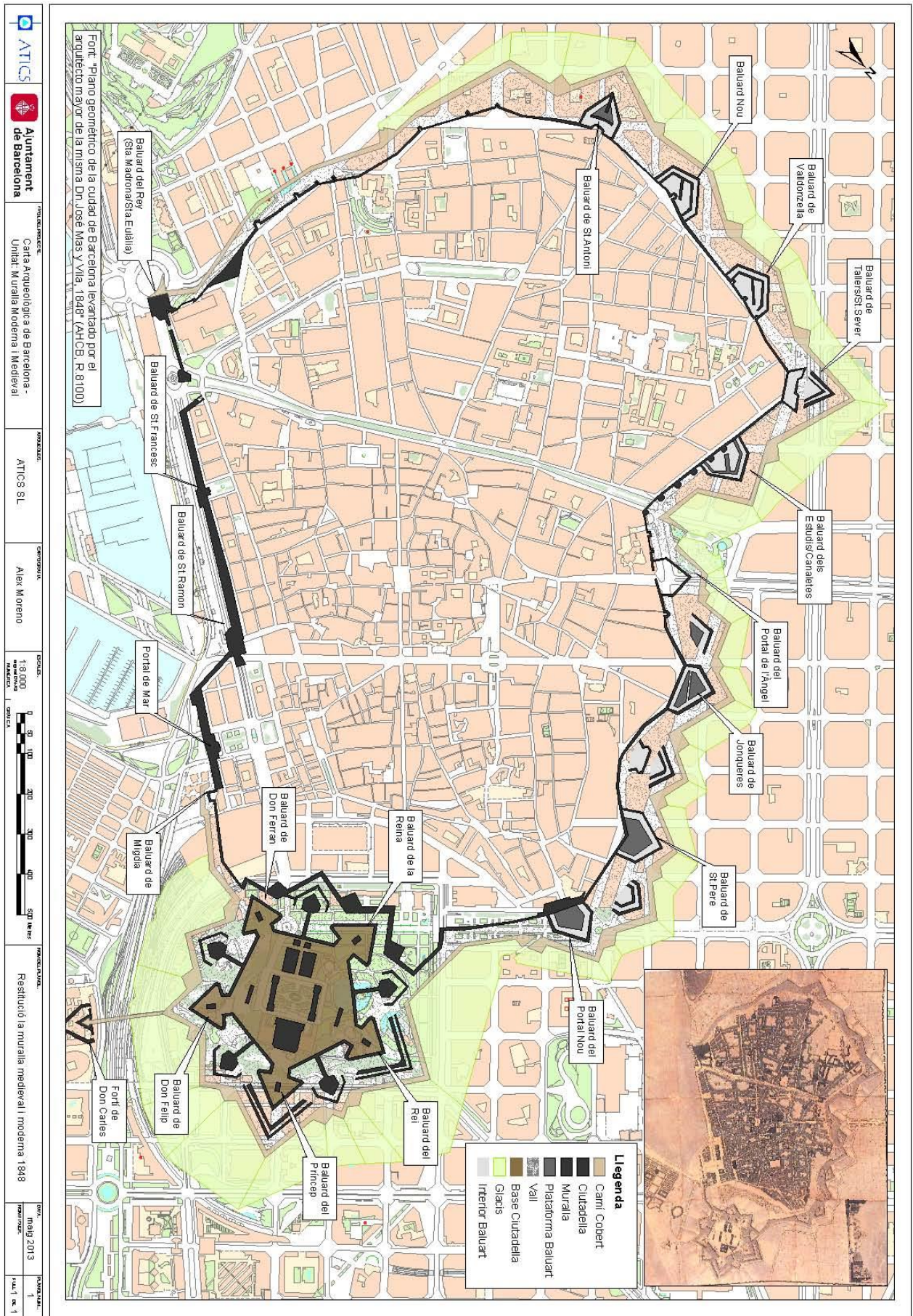


Figure 1. Alex Moreno, Archeological Map of Barcelona: Reconstruction of Medieval and Modern walls (Barcelona: Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2013)

Given the overbearing presence of the Ciutadella and the inattention of Madrid, the 'ideal' of isolating the building and the using perspective to enhance the stand-alone importance of the theatres, as with the buildings of late 1700s and early 1800s France, was simply unfeasible. Barcelona lacked the space to provide the conditions considered ideal for the neoclassical 'requirements' of framing the new secular cathedrals of the cities along rational axes. In Barcelona such wide-ranging plans were difficult to execute; the historical memory of the clearance of La Ribera for the construction of the Ciutadella fortress and the resultant construction of La Barceloneta to house the displaced (projects were drawn up by Dutch engineer Prosper de Verboom in 1719, shortly after Nueva Planta, but work did not start until around thirty years later: the inhabitants of La Ribera were left to their fates) was still a relatively recent memory, and had strongly negative connotations; as such the thought of razing large areas of the city, even for what was perceived to be 'the common good', was highly sensitive.

It is also important to take into account the origins of the Liceu as a primarily civic theatre: even with the collaboration of titled Catalan aristocrats, the project simply didn't enjoy the all-enabling power that a royally-commissioned theatre, like the Teatro Real in Madrid, would have. Barcelona could ill afford the luxury of grand street plans, and regardless, the civic but decidedly not royal, nature of the building did not hold enough sway to enable these kinds of large-scale redevelopments, even bearing in mind the eminently mercantile nature of Barcelona. The Liceu's rival, the Teatre de la Santa Creu provides an earlier example of this civic model, as the theatre was founded on the earnings of the eponymous Hospital: this 'ánimo de lucro' (desire for profit) plays a fundamental role in the history of early theatre in Barcelona. Even so, given the apparent requirement of royal decree for a theatre of prestige, it is remarkable that the

Liceu was constructed exclusively out of the will of a civic-minded industrial bourgeoisie. What is perhaps notable, however, is that despite the Liceu's original company being drawn from members of the citizenry and middle classes in Catalonia, the theatre was still dedicated to the reigning monarch in Madrid; a gesture arguably born more of flattery than of devotion.

THE PROCESS OF THE LICEU: *DESAMORTIZACIÓN*¹⁰⁸ AND TENDER

Barcelona did not have the funds or indeed the royal assent behind it to be able to undertake a project similar to the one in that was built as part of Eugène Haussmann's redefinition of the French capital. This project was a top-down order, and Emperor Napoleon III wielded his almost absolutely power together with prefect Haussmann to redesign Paris with a selection of civic monuments that together would create an area that would reflect the overarching ideologies of commerce, government and secular enlightenment. In addition, these ideals enshrined in architecture, would signify and cement the rise of a stable bourgeoisie that would, in theory, support the government. While Catalonia's bourgeoisie grew around the same time as in France and with it desired the acquisition of buildings that marked this new demographic change towards a more middle-class, socially active population that accompanied the cities mercantile growth, Barcelona was unable to execute a grandiose city plan following the fashion of axial views and rational street layouts in other European cities that would come to be epitomised by the Haussmann plan. Like Paris, the city was still hemmed in by the medieval defensive walls and stood in the shadow of the detested Ciutadella (coloured

¹⁰⁸ (the forced confiscation of tracts of land from convents and monasteries by the state)

brown on the map). If Barcelona were to have a grand opera house, it would have to ape the visibility of the other European opera houses in some fashion.

Given the vogue for a more Enlightened architecture in the 18th and 19th centuries, where a premium was placed on wide, spacious streets as opposed to the winding alleys of the medieval street plan, la Rambla was pre-Eixample (1859-onwards) Barcelona's most distinguished space, and indeed, widest avenue. Although perhaps not in the same league of prestige as St. Petersburg's Nevsky Prospekt, London's Regent Street or Nice's Promenade des Anglais in terms of 18th and 19th century urban 'salons' (all three carefully designed for the purpose), La Rambla fulfilled the role of a space for a Baudelairian experiencing of the city and for mutual viewing of the bourgeoisie and upper classes until usurped in the late 19th century by the more spacious Passeig de Gràcia and Saló de Sant Joan. As discussed in the 'From the *Galliner* to the *Llotja*' section of the previous chapter (pp. 40-43), this mutual viewing by the bourgeoisie is an essential part of the anthropological experience of the Liceu.

Although Carlson's theories around the 'sites' of theatres are useful when considering the case of the Liceu – in that the theatre is location at once on a major thoroughfare and in a service quarter beyond the central core of the city (in a combination of both Greco-Roman and Renaissance trends) – in practice the location of the Liceu was decided more by the practical process of *desamortización* that took place in the 1830s in Spain. The process of *desamortización*, although started at the end of the 18th century, reached its peak under the tenure of Prime Minister Juan Álvarez Mendizábal in the 1830s during the reign of Isabel II and came to bear his name. Although partly born out of the anticlerical liberalism popular in Europe at the time, the process did have a significant economic advantage for the country; the Church was occupying large areas of land at a time when there was a chronic shortage of living

space in the cities, and the sale of the lands would boost the empty state coffers. *Desamortización* was also designed to revert the confiscated terrain to more profitable use through setting up of small business and aimed to create an entrepreneurial or petite bourgeoisie class in Spain that would, in theory, support the crown. The economic, social and urbanistic effect on Spanish cities was enormous, and in the larger Spanish cities *ensanches* (extensions) were drawn up outside the medieval city centres on land that had previously belonged to the church – San Sebastián (Centro district, drawn up by Antonio Cortázar), Bilbao (nowadays the Abando district, designed by Severino de Achúcarro),¹⁰⁹ Valencia (today Ruzafa, Pla de Remei and Gran Via districts, by the architects Josep Calvo, Joaquim Arnau and Luis Ferreres), Málaga (by Manuel Agustín Heredia, which bears his name)¹¹⁰ and Madrid (the area of Argüelles, Salamanca and Retiro all came into Carlos María de Castro's plans)¹¹¹ are all examples of cities that acquired *ensanches*, although Barcelona's Eixample is arguably the most famous. In the pre-Eixample core, some of the church buildings remained — and exist to this day (as with the Centre d'Arts Santa Mònica, for example) — others, however, were mercilessly razed and converted to secular use. These include the Santa Caterina church, which was razed a mere two years after being rebuilt to make way for the market of the same name (where the remains of the church can still be seen) or the convent of Sant Francesc de Paula, which was demolished and made way for the Palau de la Música Catalana (Catalan Music Palace). A further example of this demolition of ecclesiastical property was the Trinitarian convent, located at the intersection of two of Barcelona's oldest

¹⁰⁹ Nieves Basurto Ferro, 'El primer ensanche de Bilbao: oportunismo y vacío legal', *Cuadernos de sección: Historia y Geografía*, 21, 1993, 229-242 <<http://www.euskomedia.org/PDFAnlt/vasconia/vas21/21229242.pdf>> [accessed 14 June 2013].

¹¹⁰ M^a Eugenia Candau, José Ignacio Díaz Pardo, Francisco Rodríguez Marín, *Málaga: Guía de Arquitectura. Ed. bilingüe* [1^a Ed.] (Seville: Consejería de Obras Públicas y Transportes, Málaga - Colegio de Arquitectos, 2005), p. 7.

¹¹¹ Adrian Shubert, *A Social History of Modern Spain* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 47.

thoroughfares, La Rambla and the ancient path of the carrer Sant Pau, leading towards the church and monastery of Sant Pau del Camp, which was spared in the *desamortización* process for its unique Romanesque architecture. The site of the Trinitarian convent was purchased by the Liceo Filarmónico de Montesión musical society, (which was then sited in another ex-convent near el Portal de l'Àngel, in the northern part of the city centre), cleared and turned into the Gran Teatre del Liceu in 1845-1847, much as we see it today.

The present location of the Liceu is evidently a compromise between the awkward shape of the site of the ex-Trinitarian convent and the lack of available space within the enclosed city of the mid-1800s before the walls were demolished in the 1850s.¹¹² However, the prestige of the central location overrode the inconvenient plan of the ex-convent. The small area of the first incarnation of the Liceu (4752m², compared to today's 10482m²)¹¹³ appears almost as a miracle of engineering; the construction of the Liceu required an ovoid horseshoe auditorium, spacious corridors, the Cercle del Liceu and boxes to fit into a small, awkwardly-shaped plot.¹¹⁴

In addition, the mercantile nature of the age and the location imposed itself on the character of the Liceu; the jammed-in location of the theatre not only represents the lack of available building space in intra-mural Barcelona, but also a reflection of the subordination of architecture to commerce; like the Teatre Principal further down the

¹¹² See 'Le Nouveau Plan de Barcelone' by cartographer N. de Fer for a view of the old city, the new city and the location of the Trinitarian convent in Ramon Soley's *Atles de Barcelona*, Vol. I, (Barcelona: Editorial Mediterrània, 1998), p. 105.

¹¹³ Ignasi de Solà-Morales, *L'arquitectura del Liceu: Barcelona's Opera House* (Barcelona: Edicions UPC: 2000), p. 144.

¹¹⁴ An English map of Barcelona dating from 1869 offers an interesting point of view in that, uniquely among all the other buildings shown on the map, the detail of the orientation of the Liceu's auditorium is shown. Ramon Soley, *Atles de Barcelona*, Vol. II (Barcelona: Editorial Mediterrània: 1998), p. 849.

street, the Liceu spilt on to the Rambla to form a contiguous façade with the commercial establishments both surrounding it on la Rambla and on carrer Sant Pau.

In addition to the complexity of the site, the construction of the Liceu was marred by a sequence of changes of architects. Ferran Sagarra i Trias underlines the complexity and the controversial nature of the Liceu project amongst contemporary architects of the 1840s: The original architect, Francesc d'Assís Soler i Mestres was appointed by the Liceu's chosen 'project manager' Joaquim Gispert d'Anglí in December 1844, but lasted a mere six months before the project was offered to Nicolas Auguste Thumeloup, a member of the Institut de France.¹¹⁵ However, Gispert chose the design of established Mataró architect Miquel Garriga i Roca who, as a rationalist architect interested in contemporary German architecture, drew up plans for the Liceu that reflected a considered blend of structure, technology and urbanism, seeking to integrate the theatre into its surroundings on La Rambla. While undoubtedly a proponent of function over form from his German education; Garriga i Roca proposed a union of science, art and decoration for decoration's sake.

Nevertheless, his design was constrained by Gispert, who later overruled Garriga's design for the façade and promoted the design from an inexperienced French engineer, Viguíé, that resembled the façade of the Principal, further down La Rambla, causing considerable consternation amongst the Catalan and Spanish architectural community, as detailed in *BENA* (Boletín Enciclopédico de Nobles Artes). The result of Gispert's and Viguíé's intervention is largely what stands today; a relatively bland façade for a building of such standing. Described by the editors (amongst whom was

¹¹⁵ Ferran Sagarra i Trias, *Barcelona: Ciutat de transició (1848-1868)* (Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Catalan, 1996), p. 94.

César Daly) of *BENA* as ‘neo-florentine’ and ‘*renaixentista*’,¹¹⁶ it was qualified by contemporary architects as a kind of ‘transition style’ that borrowed from European sensibilities. Nevertheless, the comment from the editors hints at the perceived compromise inherent in the aesthetic of the building – satisfactory, but bereft of the distinctive vernacular touches that would eventually come to compose the style that would come to define Barcelona architecturally: *modernisme*. To a certain extent, one may argue that the modest universality of the façade (or, perhaps even characterless style) would provide a discreet, restrained counterpoint the exuberance that would follow in architectural terms.

The consternation caused in the Spanish architectural world by the ‘neoflorentine’ façade of the Liceu is more complex than mere xenophobia; the fact that a French architect’s plans got to the final stage is evidence enough of this. In addition, as Ferran Sagarra i Trias notes, Thumeloup, a French academic who was head of the Central School of Architecture in Paris was considered a worthy author of the project;¹¹⁷ Garriga i Roca himself described Thumeloup as ‘advantaged artist’.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, the larger architectural community, as well as the fundraisers of the Liceu deemed Viguí’s façade somewhat of a foreign intrusion, rather than international collaboration, as seen in this extract from the *BENA* in 1846.

What a contrast! Our beloved Queen Isabel II desires that the palace’s accoutrements be Spanish, and Catalan if possible; she orders that the operators that work on the project and the professors that manage the project be Spanish; the Teatro del Trinitario, that will bear the name

¹¹⁶ ‘*renaixentista*’ refers to the period of the resurgence of Catalan culture, arts, architecture and literature in the mid-19th century called the *Renaixença* (rebirth), clearly referencing the Renaissance. Ibid., p. 97.

¹¹⁷ Ferran Sagarra i Trias, *Barcelona: Ciutat de transició*, p. 97.

¹¹⁸ ‘*Aventajado artista*’, *ibid.*

‘Liceu of Doña Isabella II’ will be directed by a foreigner, but a mere engineer! [...] In any event it would have been more patriotic to follow any of the forty plans of Don Miguel Garriga, that I saw at the court, even with regards to the façade; all of them preferable to the façade of abysmal taste imported from abroad, all the while endeavouring that everything in this great theatre be from our country, instead of creating what seems to be a den for upstart artists, where the only Spanish thing about it is its name and its location in Barcelona.¹¹⁹

Indignant at the rejection of his design in favour of Viguí’s plan, Garriga i Roca left the project soon after being chosen, and was replaced by Oriol Mestres i Esplugas, who took the reins of the scheme until the building’s completion in 1847, and continued to be involved with the Liceu for decades afterwards, leading the reconstruction in the wake of the 1868 fire and implementing his 1859 design for the Liceu façade in 1874.

The choice of Viguí’s façade over his own was not Garriga i Roca’s only grievance with the Liceu; he staunchly disagreed with the Liceu’s development company over the use of the building, having designed the ‘Teatro de los Trinitarios’ (as the Liceu was initially called) as a public entity, corresponding to his function as a civic architect. However, the shareholders had invested on the understanding that the theatre would be run as a private institution. This method of gaining capital (exchanging shares for property of the boxes in perpetuity) lasted until 1981, and became one of the hallmarks

¹¹⁹ ‘Qué contraste!’ Cuando nuestra adorada reina Doña Isabel 2ª dispone que sea español, y catalán si posible, todo el ajuar de su palacio; cuando encarga que sean españoles los operarios que lo trabajan y los profesores que lo dirijan, el Teatro del Trinitario que ha de conocerse con el nombre del Liceo de Doña Isabel 2ª, [...] será dirigido por un extranjero, pero un simple maquinista!!! Más patriótico hubiera sido por cierto seguir hasta en la fachada los planes de D. Miguel Garriga escogiendo cualquiera de sus cuarenta proyectos que vi en la corte, preferibles todos al frontis del pésimo gusto importado de otras tierras, procurando que todo fuese nacional en este gran teatro, en vez de crear como al parecer se pretende una mina para artistas advenedizos en un establecimiento que al fin solo tendrá de español el nombre y el estar en Barcelona.’ BENA, 1847, p. 381 quoted in Sagarra i Trias, *Barcelona: Ciutat de transició*, p. 96.

of the Liceu, which became the last privately owned opera theatre in Europe. The system guaranteed the Liceu a loyal audience due to the feeling of owning a part of what came to be one of the most exclusive symbols of a social group, and also ensured annual payments that financed the company that operated the theatre artistically. However, since a large proportion of the seats were beyond the control of the company that ran the theatre, it meant great financial instability for the *empresarios* that ran the theatre. Another key to understanding the controversy over the façade and the architecture of those buildings that come in the wake of Liceu is the difference in the pre-requisites for public and private buildings. Public building plans in the 19th century in Spain had to be approved by the San Fernando Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Madrid, which required the plans to be signed off by an architect. However, if the building were of a private nature, the plans could be signed off by the site manager, meaning that any changes specified by the promotor (in this case Joaquim Gispert d'Anglí) could be included without the consent of the project architect. As such, Gispert d'Anglí was able to overrule Garriga i Roca's design for the façade with Viguíé's proposal without the former's consent. In addition, the status of the Liceu as a private building, rather than a public one, also allowed the project to exceed the maximum height restrictions imposed by Barcelona city council.

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE THEATRES: THE LICEU AND THE PALAU DE LA MÚSICA CATALANA

These tensions over the public-private condition of the Liceu fed into the architectural community, and contemporary urbanists such as Oriol i Bernadet and Rovira i Trias argued that the status of the Liceu depended not on the source of the funding but rather on the service the building would perform within the city. In a comparison of the Liceu to the railway being laid at the time from Barcelona to Mataró, the urbanists noted that

although the theatre was privately financed and designed to generate an income, the Gran Teatre del Liceu would be beyond doubt a public entity for the benefit of the city.¹²⁰ However, the extent to which this idealistic concept of the benevolence of the city's leaders was fulfilled is not entirely clear. Essentially, those who provided the funding for the projects deemed that they should decide the building's aesthetic; as such the restrictions placed on the Liceu by the Ajuntament due to its intended public status clashed with the source of the capital. The planning restrictions applicable to public buildings in Barcelona resulted in the appearance of more extravagant projects from privately-funded architects. To this end, buildings now part of Barcelona's modernista heritage, such as the Palau, Park and Colònia Güell, the Cases Milà, Batlló, Amatller, Lleó i Morera and Bellesguard and, of course, the Sagrada Família were all born of private capital, and in most cases funded by industrial barons, with the exception of the Sagrada Família which was funded by subscriptions and private donations. Even the case of the Hospital de Sant Pau, built some fifty to sixty years after the Liceu, illustrates the prominent role the source of the funding plays. Its intended function was to replace various outdated hospitals within the city (including the Hospital de Santa Creu, the institution that founded the Teatre de la Santa Creu/Principal) and as such was considered a public entity. Nevertheless, the hospital was founded on a large private endowment from a Paris-based Catalan banker, Pau Serra.

The Palau de la Música is quite a different beast from the Liceu in terms of its remit, architecture and the programming. This said, the two spaces undoubtedly have a symbiotic relationship within the city, and together with Rafael Moneo's Auditori (1999, a purpose-built home for the Catalan National Orchestra, the Barcelona Symphony

¹²⁰ *Boletín Enciclopédico de Nobles Artes*, 1846, p. 378, quoted in Sagarra i Trias, *Barcelona: Ciutat de transició*, p. 64.

Orchestra and the Catalonia College of Music) share the prestige of the most distinguished musical spaces in the city. Nevertheless, the Liceu and the Palau are both exemplary of their time in terms of the manner of their construction, and the desires that founded them: like the Liceu, the Palau de la Música was also borne out of a tradition of private, rather than public funding, but arguably suffers little of the same controversy over its perceived ownership since the institution had private origins and was financed by 500 and 1000 peseta shares that returned 4%.¹²¹ The private company that promoted the Palau de la Música, the Orfeó Català, originally had its home on carrer dels Lledó in a Gothic mansion near Plaça Sant Jaume and sought new, more spacious premises. Like the Liceu, the construction was again entrusted to a local architect, Lluís Domènech i Muntaner.

However, the funding of the Palau differs slightly from that of the Liceu. Since the Palau was seen to be the expression of a much more vernacular culture in comparison to the Liceu's internationalism, the *promotores* were able to attract subscriptions in exchange for less than what the Liceu had offered. Rather than selling shares in the Liceu for boxes, the Palau was funded more by shares and donations from industrial barons to be seen to be promoting local talent and culture, rather than the purchasing system that had operated at the Liceu, although the precedent set by the Liceu sixty years before the construction of the Palau de la Música is still important as a model that the Palau learnt from.

Even the sites of the two institutions bear similarities. Just as the Liceu replaces the Trinitarian convent on La Rambla, the Palau was built on the cloister of the convent of Sant Francesc de Paula; once more again the building is subject to the almost extreme

¹²¹ *Revista musical catalana: butlletí mensual de l'Orfeó Català*, Orfeó Català, no. 1 (1904), Barcelona, p. 9.

conditions of the site. As Ignasi Solà-Morales suggests: ‘The Palau de la Música is shoehorned into an impossible plot; the Liceu is likewise conditioned by the whimsical geometry of its site’.¹²² like the Liceu, the Palau suffers from its corner location, but learns from the problems the Liceu has. In the latter case, the horseshoe auditorium is accommodated as best it can, while the Palau de la Música’s auditorium makes use of steel-frame technology to suspend the long, rectangular auditorium that sits perpendicular to the main façade above a central public area. The façade of the Palau de la Música is also worth noting in that its position in the narrow alleys of the Sant Pere district robs the building of the distance required to appreciate the local artisanry and Miquel Blay’s sculpture that juts out of the corner of the building.¹²³ Nevertheless, in contrast to the Liceu, which by and large neglects the façade facing the ostensibly lower-prestige thoroughfare, Domènech i Muntaner has continued the outlandish theme of the façade around the corner and along the street, underlining its status as a *modernista* architectural icon that was hugely representative of its time, and was detested by the following *noucentista* cultural movement. In comparison, the Liceu’s carrer Sant Pau façade is notably plain and more in line with the typically restrained *noucentista* aesthetic, although the last refurbishment has gone some way to revitalising the side entrance and restoring it to public use as an entrance to the shop and to the box offices.

¹²² ‘El Palau de la Música está metido con un calzador en un solar imposible; el Liceu está igualmente condicionado por la caprichosa geometría de su planta.’ Llätzer Moix, *La ciudad de los arquitectos* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 1994), p. 233.

¹²³ See Lluís Domènech i Girbau, *L’arquitectura del Palau* (Barcelona: Lunwerg Editores, 2000) for more information on the Palau de la Música’s construction and architecture. The author is the grandson of the Palau’s architect Domènech i Muntaner.

THE LICEU AND ITS SURROUNDINGS: THEATRE AS URBAN NEXUS

The historical context of urbanism in Barcelona from the mid-1850s onwards means that the construction of the Liceu did not take place in a vacuum: as the theatre was consolidated as one of the most prestigious theatres in Barcelona, it became a civic nexus, and indeed, the academic Joan Bassegoda Nonell described the Liceu (together with Plaça Reial) as the most important constructions of the first half of the 19th century in Barcelona.¹²⁴ As can be noted in the example of the rival Teatre de la Santa Creu (later renamed the Principal as I noted also in Chapter 1 (p. 29), the building of the theatre served as the impulse for changes in the urban landscape in order to accord the structure the spatial, and thus visual, importance thought necessary to reflect the prestige of the institution. The square accompanying the Teatre de la Santa Creu, then named Pla de les Comèdies (today Plaça del Teatre), seems to have been around as long as the theatre itself, albeit with some embellishments, such as the statue of Frederic Soler, a.k.a. Serafí Pitarra, author of *Liceístas y Cruzados*, the satirical play chronicling the rivalry between the Santa Creu/Principal and the Liceu mentioned in the 'Barcelona: Industry and Class' section of the previous chapter (pp. 26-49). Although currently the site of a billiards hall and a nightclub, the Principal's importance in the city before the construction of the Liceu is unquestionable, having been the venue for many premières of operatic works as with Mozart's *Così fan tutte* (1798), Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* and *La Cenerentola* (both in 1818) and *Otello* (1821), and Verdi's *Nabucco* (1842). In the period after the Liceu was built the Principal continued to stage and premiere a significant number of works by Catalan artists such as Adrià Gual and Apel·les Mestres,

¹²⁴ Joan Bassegoda Nonell, 'A Barcelona tots els edificis son distints. L'arquitectura barcelonina entre 1870 i 1980', *Espais*, 11, 1988, p.37. Available at <http://www.recolecta.net/buscador/single_page.jsp?id=oai:raco.cat:article/91185> [accessed 2 June 2012]

Rusiñol and Guimerà. Although these works were non-operatic, they constitute an important part of Catalan dramaturgy that had its home at the Principal, rather than at the Liceu. Indeed, the eventual triumph of the Liceu over the Principal (which was to be demolished at the end of the 19th century, but was given a temporary reprieve) was symbolic of the new order within Barcelona and Spain; the decline of the Santa Creu/Principal mirrored the decadence of the ancien régime of monarchists and aristocracy in the face of the rise of liberalism and the new bourgeoisie that was making itself felt through the success of its private enterprise and the construction of icons to represent their own success, such as the Gran Teatre del Liceu.

In addition to the overshadowing of the Principal as the main theatre of prestige in Barcelona, the new central role of the Liceu in Barcelona society was on several occasions to be reflected in a reconfiguration of the urban fabric surrounding it. For the purposes of this discussion, urban theorist Sylvia Ostrowetsky offers a convenient method of analysis, breaking the urban landscape into ‘morphemes’ – the particular elements of individual buildings, ‘signs’ – a particular building as a whole, and finally ‘urbemes’, a designation of the area immediately surrounding the ‘sign’.¹²⁵ In the context of the Liceu then, a morpheme is the awning, the Liceu is a sign and the carrer Sant Pau and carrer Unió sector of the Raval acts as its urbeme. Soon after the construction of the Liceu the theatre’s board requested the city council make changes to the fabric of the Rambla to allow carriages coming from either the port or Plaça Catalunya to be able to change direction once they arrived at the Liceu, and even suggested cutting down the trees in front of the theatre to improve access and visibility.¹²⁶ The far-reaching Reforma del Casco Antiguo de Barcelona [Redevelopment

¹²⁵ Carlson, *Places of Performance*, p. 12.

¹²⁶ Pla i Arxé, *Liceu: Un espai per a l’art*, p. 79

of the Old City of Barcelona] competition, held by the City Council in 1927, included two proposals that intended to give the Liceu the frontage and visual importance the Rambla façade did not accord it by reconfiguring the immediately adjacent urbeme of the Raval. These designs often reflected the plans of young architect Eusebi Bona (who would go on to design the Royal Palace at Pedralbes) who, at the request of the Cercle del Liceu, had submitted a plan for the reconfiguration of the façade in a neoclassical style and bringing the La Rambla and Sant Pau façades together at a glassed-in cylinder, with porches at the bottom and a dome on the top.¹²⁷ A particular problem identified by Pla i Arxé is the question of the building's 'permeability', and the orientation of the auditorium was an obstacle to this in that it sat practically perpendicular to the main entrance of the Liceu – something that was not an issue at the Principal. Bona's plans set about reconfiguring the accesses to the auditorium by highlighting the 'prow' of the building that jutted out onto the Rambla by creating a diaphanous glassed-in section that ran the height of the building and using porches and arcades as entrances on the Sant Pau side. This is remarkably similar to the ground-floor architecture of the Palau de la Música, whose steel curtain walls, columns and extensive use of stained glass create a more permeable ground floor which guides the visitor into the foyer and then funnels them up the staircases towards the auditorium.

Unfortunately, the plans submitted for the Reforma del Casco Antiguo were not as far-reaching as Eusebi Bona's and were largely limited to 'landscaping' around the Liceu, rather than reforming the exterior of the building *per se*. Josep Plantadas's proposal suggested the widening of the Ramble between carrer Sant Pau and carrer Hospital, creating a repetition of the La Rambla façade on the Sant Pau side which would

¹²⁷ Ibid.

lend a symmetry to the building and provide a separate access to the Cercle del Liceu, closely echoing Eusebi Bona's project to lend some symmetry to the view of the theatre from the adjacent Pla de la Boqueria – up until this point only a certain part of the carrer Sant Pau wall had been decorated at all.¹²⁸ Marc-Jesús Bertran, author of *El gran teatro del Liceu de Barcelona, 1837-1930* (Barcelona: Institut gràfic Oliva de Vilanova, 1931), entered a more ambitious proposal for the creation of an avenue from Plaça Sant Jaume down to La Rambla which would end in a large square between carrer Sant Pau and carrer Hospital, thus enabling the creation of a main entrance that would respect the stage-auditorium axis and avoid what he considered the unnecessary turns involved in accessing the auditorium from the current entrance.¹²⁹ In the same vein, *modernista* architect Josep Vilaseca suggested in 1927 the creation of an axial road following the lines of carrer Sant Pau and carrer Cardenal Casañas, crossing Pla de la Boqueria, designed to enhance the existing civic nexus of ancient pathways and also to heighten the sharp profile of the theatre. This plan was partially carried out, and can be seen in the current incarnation of Pla de la Boqueria.

In terms of the 'urbeme', or immediate area surrounding the Liceu, a brief comparison of other opera houses in different major European cities reveals some idiosyncrasies peculiar to the Liceu. The reference to Barcelona's opera house as the Liceu reflects a vernacular metonymy. This appears to become so entrenched within the language and the culture of the city (and indeed of the country at large), that the Liceu comes to connote its own urbeme to an extent that is it notable that the metro station immediately adjacent is named in its honour: equivalent stations in other cities such as 'Opéra' in Paris and 'Ópera' in Madrid appear to reflect the importance of the concept

¹²⁸ Pla i Arxé, *Liceu: Un espai per a l'art*, p. 79.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

rather than the importance of the theatre to the city, despite the opera houses having more specific toponyms: Opéra Garnier and el Teatro Real respectively.

MADRID AND THE TEATRO REAL

At this point, it is worth a brief digression to contextualise the Liceu's *madrileño* counterpart, the Teatro Real, given the above explanation of the importance of the Liceu's status as a private theatre. The Real is arguably equally prestigious given its status as the home of opera in the Spanish capital, and enjoys a fierce rivalry with the Liceu. However, the Real was born of a totally different mindset, as suggested by its 'royal' status, and as such, has a different character to that of the Liceu, but shares some similarities: both the Real and the Liceu have prime city-centre locations in their respective cities, but for different reasons. The La Rambla/carrer Sant Pau location of the Barcelona opera house is by and large somewhat serendipitous; while the position of the Teatro Real was more conditioned by royal intervention as well as urban planning; the location of the Teatro Real directly to the east of the Palacio Real in the historic Los Austrias area of the city underlines the importance of the royal input into both the building and its location. This omnipotent aspect is naturally absent in the construction of the Liceu; its location on what was Barcelona's main artery in the mid-19th century can be considered vastly more 'popular' than the location of the Real. By contrast, it is noteworthy that the Teatro Real stands apart from the surrounding urban fabric: instead of being integrated into its environment, the Real stands as an island designed to enhance the visual effect of the theatre – an effect that the town planners of Barcelona attempted to recreate with their plans for squares that mimicked the visibility inherent to the Real.

Although the *desamortización* process did take place in Madrid, the site that the Real enjoys is one that had previously been occupied by the Teatro de los Caños del Peral (which in turn was built on a public washing-place) until the project was handed to the architect Antonio López Aguado in 1817. Due to various occurrences of lack of funds and the outbreak of the Carlist Wars, the Real did not officially premiere until 7th May 1850; thirty-two years after its inception and three years after the Liceu opened its doors. The economies of the two theatres offer an explanation for their different construction intervals; the Real was funded by a public purse emptied by the Carlist Wars (1832-39 and 1846-49). A tax on cork oak was insufficient to bring in the required capital, requiring a Royal Decree to order the completion of the theatre.¹³⁰ This stands in contrast comparison to the ‘joint-stock company’ funding model of the Liceu that Joan Ramon Resina mentions¹³¹, which meant that the gestation period of the Liceu was minimal; the placing of the cornerstone of the Liceu on the 11th April 1845, with an opening night a mere two years later on the 4th of April 1847. The model of finance that funded the construction of the venue was unusual in theatres of the time, but meant that the Liceu’s system of boxes and subscriptions created a greater sensation of propriety and ownership, exemplified by the widespread practice of framing the certificate of purchase for the box. By extension the Liceu was considered to belong to Barcelona in both a legal and metaphorical sense, given its status as where the rich, who owned the boxes and the poor, who owned the music, came together and viewed each other, but did not apparently interact, echoing the words of Joaquim Nadal Ferrer mentioned in the previous chapter (see p. 35). A similar kind of relationship can be perceived in the interrelation between the Raval as an ostensibly working-class, low-income

¹³⁰ For more on the Teatro Real’s history, see Joaquín Turina Gómez, *Historia del Teatro Real* (Madrid: Editorial Alianza, 1997).

¹³¹ Joan Ramon Resina, *Barcelona’s Vocation of Modernity*, p.40.

neighbourhood that is home to Barcelona's arguably most prestigious venue. The way this interrelation has changed since the growth of the cultural economy in Barcelona from the 1980s onwards will be explored in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3: THE LICEU AND THE RAVAL: URBAN REGENERATION, RECONSTRUCTION AND POLITICAL THEATRES

Although the theatre is undoubtedly a Barcelona institution inasmuch as its patrons were from the ruling classes of the city, and came from their residences in the Zona Alta and the prestigious Eixample, the relationship the Liceu building bears to its immediate surrounding area of the Raval is not so clear-cut. Within the wider context, for the purposes of the clarity and consistency, the area roughly bounded by La Rambla, Avinguda del Paral·lel, Ronda Sant Pau, Ronda Sant Antoni, Plaça Universitat and carrer Pelai will be referred to as the Raval. The reasons for the choice of this particular designation are various – as one of Barcelona’s most extrovert neighbourhoods the abovementioned area means different things to its denizens, neighbours, city planners and local government and the correspondingly different toponyms connote topics such as historical memory, urban planning, exclusion and/or aversion, romantic debauchery. Although the term ‘Raval’ has been criticised as something of a post-modern artificial imposition on part of Barcelona City Council for effacing the indubitably charismatic characteristic of the neighbourhood, it does however avoid the exoticising effects of the term ‘el barrio chino’ which appeared in the 1920s, the bureaucratising effect of ‘Districte V’ that was used during the dictatorship, and the top-down, snobbish tone of *barrios bajos* or *bajos fondos* (slums).

In this chapter I will examine the development of the Raval through the 19th and into the 20th centuries and the ways in which the Liceu has formed part of the area’s refashioning. Ostensibly an Arabic word (ar-rabad), the form ‘arraval/raval’ is found in toponyms in Barcelona, Girona and the Balearic Islands in reference to an outer or extramural part of

a city or town: The Institut d'Estudis Catalans dictionary defines the term as 'Part of a settlement that is or has been extramural', 'outer part of a settlement' or 'settlement adjacent to another, larger one',¹³² all three meanings alluding to the liminality or marginality of the settlement. The history of the Raval, although superficially alluded to here,¹³³ is that of an area that has served the *polis* across La Rambla (itself another Arabic term referring to a river bed). As the Roman city of Barcino grew up on the *Mons Taber*, the site of the Roman city and co-terminous with today's Plaça Sant Jaume (the smallest ring of walls on the map on the following page), the medieval city grew to fill the walls constructed around the area roughly corresponding to Ciutat Vella and la Ribera in the 13th century. Given the rapid population expansion of the intramural city, services considered undesirable were relegated across the Rambla to the area of the Raval: note the site of the Hospital de Santa Creu (itself an amalgamation of three leper hospitals), as well of the Boqueria market (the name of which may be etymologically related to 'butcher', such as in the French boucherie, giving some clue as to its origins as an abattoir). In essence, the *raison d'être* of the Raval is to serve the centre, and has been since the 13th century when it was beyond the walls constructed around 1285 at the order of King Peter II. Later on, in the second half of the 14th century, the inhabitants of the barri del Carme, an extramural village, petitioned to be included in the walling-in of the city, and in 1368 the construction of the second part of the city wall that enclosed the Raval started.¹³⁴

¹³² 'Part d'una població que està o havia estat extramurs', 'Part extrema d'una població' and 'Població annexa a una altra de més gran', Institut d'Estudis Catalans: dlc.iec.cat [accessed 22 February 2011].

¹³³ For further details see Resina's *Barcelona's Vocation of Modernity* (pStanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008) Jaume Artigues's *Història d'un barri servidor* (Barcelona: Consell Municipal del Districte Vè, 1980), Ferran Sagarra i Trias's *Barcelona: Ciutat de transició 1848-1868* (Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 1997).

¹³⁴ Jaume Artigues, *Història d'un barri servidor* (Barcelona: Consell Municipal del Districte Vè, 1980), p.62; although the wall that ran the length of the Rambla was not knocked down until considerably later, thus splitting the city into 'ciutat vella' and 'ciutat nova'.

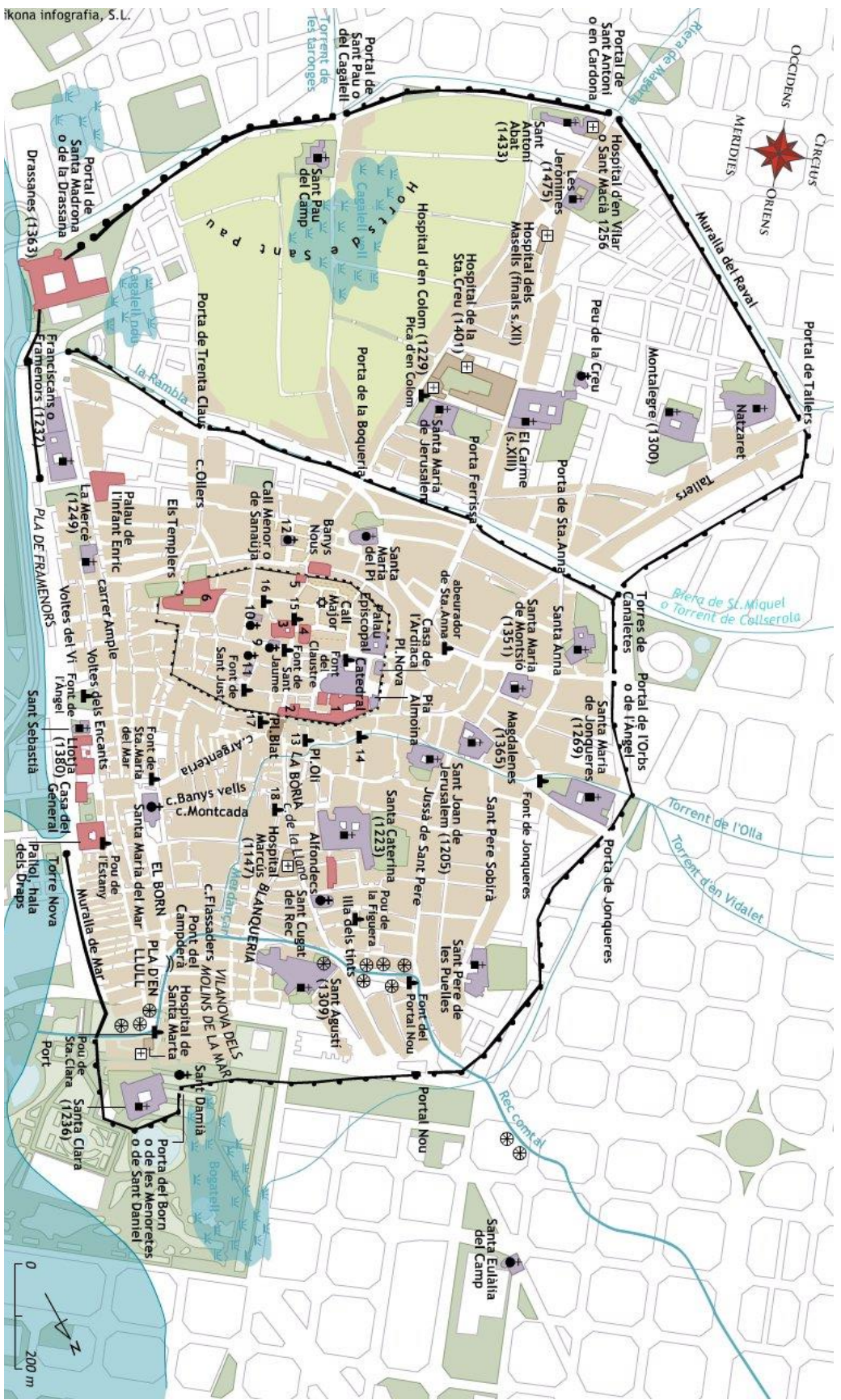


Figure 2. Illustrative map of Barcelona showing the Roman centre, the first set of walls around Ciutat Vella and La Ribera and then the subsequent defenses around the Raval. The Liceu would be built just across the Rambla from the Porta de la Boqueria. Source: *Varia: Reconstruccions i deconstruccions* <http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_D_ZWxl_Q_w/UcF140usZkI/AAAAAACAoo/Tc09hFDGg0/s1600/barcelonas_xiv_jpg> [accessed 27 August 2013]

Artisan and cottage industries flourished in the Raval, and later the area became synonymous with the early manifestations of the Industrial Revolution. Given this history as a 'barri servidor' (service quarter) as Jaume Artigues refers to it, and the subsequent construction of the Eixample in the latter half of the 19th century, which drew the city's population away from the narrow streets of the old city to the spacious Cerdà-engineered utopia of chamfered streets, it comes as no surprise that Raval retained its liminal, marginal status.

The Raval's mixture of working-class neighbourhood and industrial character plays a part in the creation of a theatre cluster just beyond the Raval, on and around Avinguda Paral·lel. In the latter half of the 19th century, theatre genres such as music-hall and cabaret spread throughout Europe, and Barcelona is no exception. These new types of theatre represented cheap entertainment accessible to a class of people who had neither the wealth nor the musical knowledge of those in the *galliner* at the Liceu. The popular nature of this theatre culture arguably suffers from the ambivalence towards theatre found in previous centuries, and once again Carlson's reference to the physical liminality of theatre becomes germane. In this instance the popular theatre in Barcelona occupies marginal or ex-industrial sites at the edges of the city close to the steep terrain of Montjuïc mountain. Rather than being able to take advantage of confiscated land as they had in the earlier part of the century, the promoters of the popular theatre in the late 19th century looked to the mixed-industrial area of the Paral·lel, referred to romantically as the 'Montmartre' of Barcelona, the city's own popular 'theatreland' that provided what Serge Salaün qualifies as 'mass entertainment', noting that in 1926, Barcelona was home to 149 'cinema and varieties' locations,¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Serge Salaün and Carlos Serrano, eds. *Los felices años veinte: España, crisis y modernidad* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, Ediciones de Historia, 2006), p. 87.

(even more than Madrid with 93) that catered for the working-classes who filled the nearby factories and lived in the cheap, dense housing of the Raval.

The history of Paral·lel is closely tied to its marginal and working-class nature. Associated with the anarchic terrorism of *lerrouxismo* and the social upheaval of the early decades of the 20th century, Paral·lel was the site of the famous La Canadiense factory and 1910 strike, which paralysed Catalonia but enshrined an eight-hour working day. The industrial nature of Paral·lel, like the Raval before it, turned it into an area of dubious repute, home to notorious cabaret theatres, *boîtes*, and sex show clubs, still extant today in the famed 'Bagdad'. The licentious nature of the area is frequently mentioned in the literature that catalogued the Raval, described by writers both local and international – Josep Maria de Sagarra's 1932 novel *Vida privada [Private Life]* (Barcelona: Edicions Proa, 2000) features a group of upper middle-class wealthy Catalans enjoying a night out in the notoriously insalubrious *boîtes* of the Raval, and Jean Genet's 1949 *Le Journal du voleur [A Thief's Tale]* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966) charts the writer's debauched, hazy stay in the Raval during his time in Barcelona.¹³⁶

CULTURE AS PANACEA: THE CASE OF THE RAVAL

At the heart of cultural planning and urban design in Barcelona since the late 1970s has been the importance of the Raval, and 'solutions' to the problems the area presents. As noted above, the history of the area as a service quarter has meant constant controversies and arguments over the relationship of the Raval to the rest of Barcelona.

¹³⁶ Joan Ramon Resina goes into depth on this topic in chapter 3 of *Barcelona's Vocation of Modernity*, (pp. 93-119). Other works that describe the nightlife of the Raval include Eduardo Mendoza's 1975 novel *La verdad sobre el caso Savolta* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 2011), Terenci Moix's 1976 *La caiguda de l'imperi sodomita* (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1988), and Ruiz Zafón's *La sombra del viento* (Barcelona: Planeta, 2001). Films on the topic include José Antonio de la Loma's *Las alegres chicas de El Molino* (1977), Cesc Gay's *En la ciudad* (2003), and Antoni Verdaguier's *Raval, Raval* (2006), to name a few.

Severely delimited by the wide streets of the *rondes*, the area resists cohesive labelling. The various names for the area tend to reflect the rest of the city's concept of the area, perhaps even more so since the City Council's 'esponjament' (cleaning-up) of the area, and the Raval's undoubted gentrification. Key to the 'esponjament' is the use of culture as a regenerative impetus; the use of regeneration through culture has its roots in the 1960s, and most major cities have fostered (or indeed, taken advantage of) artistic communities as a way to regenerate deprived or blighted urban areas. This scale of intervention varies, from the gentrification of Shoreditch and Hoxton in London from a low-income area to a leisure area with facilities aimed at people with large disposable incomes, to the construction of the Lincoln Center in New York as an example of one of the largest-scale government-sponsored operations of its kind. The perceived power of architecture in conjunction with culture as a panacea for urban problems is common in post-industrial cities. The Lincoln Center in is arguably the first (built from 1955-69, and one of the largest in scale and ambition, clearing large swathes of Midtown Manhattan next to what might be considered the city's own Raval: the service quarter of Hell's Kitchen (which itself has been subject to toponymic alteration as Clinton, as designated on New York City maps). Like the Raval, Hell's Kitchen was a small industrial centre on the edge of Manhattan that was home to tanneries, docks and railways that became a magnet for immigration after the American Civil War and gained a reputation as an area infamous for crime and racketeering.

Developments such as the Lincoln Centre are usually large-scale, culturally-driven urban renewal projects tend to include an architecturally modern museum or art gallery, a theatre or performance space and on occasion, some designer infrastructure to funnel visitors from other areas to the complex. By and large these complexes seek to embrace contemporary culture, and if possible, some kind of regional or vernacular

peculiarity to contextualise and justify the large spends these kind of projects entail. This type of cultural installations can be separated into two waves; those that have been able to capitalise on a contemporary regeneration 'under their own steam', and tend to be in larger cities with established service economies and a population with a large disposable income to spend on cultural products. The second wave of developments tends to include smaller cities that have struggled with the collapse or decline of traditional industries and the move towards an adoption of tertiary and service industries. These cities seek to emulate the success of the installations in the larger, more economically-diverse cities, and open cultural facilities, often under the auspices of a larger, known institution or focussing on a world-renowned artist. In doing so, the second wave of developments hope to attract artists with the cheap rents and existing cultural facilities, and with it a younger population. This serves as a way to dynamise the cultural and tertiary economies of the city. In the first example, we have Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano's Pompidou Centre in Paris, in Newcastle and Gateshead Dominic Williams's conversion of the Hovis mill into the BALTIC, Foster's Sage Gateshead and Wilkinson Eyre's Stirling Prize-winning Gateshead Millennium Bridge; Valencia's Ciutat de les Arts i Ciències incorporating an opera house, museum, and IMAX theatre designed by native architect Santiago Calatrava; Cardiff's Wales Millennium Centre designed by Capita; and Rome's MAXXI, designed by Zara Hadid. In the second case, Spain has witnessed the spectacular success of Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Bilbao and Norman Foster's metrobilbao stations as well as the less successful constructions of Peter Eisenman's Cidade de Cultura de Galícia in Santiago de Compostela and the Fundación Oscar Niemeyer in Avilés (designed by the architect himself). Other recent examples of the second stage are the Louvre-Lens by Japanese architects SANAA and Imray Culbery, the Centre Pompidou-Metz by Shigeru Ban, the Turner Contemporary in

Margate and Hepworth Wakefield (both by David Chipperfield). With the exception of the Cidade de Cultura, all are examples of singular buildings that come with the 'seal of approval' of either a larger, prestigious institution or an association with a world-class artist, and all include an internationally-recognized architectural firm, harnessing the attraction of so-called 'starchitects' to justify and add value to their projects.

Arguably, Barcelona has traces of the first 'wave' of this culturisation of the economy, and follows a developmental trajectory that looks towards the massive injection of capital into cultural institutions that has its roots in François Mitterrand's Grands Projets in 1980s Paris, which bore fruit in what might be considered the predecessors of the cultural projects mentioned above: I.M.Pei's Louvre Pyramid, the Grande Arche de la Défense and of course, the Centre Pompidou. The 1986 announcement of Barcelona as the host of the 1992 Olympics, and the intense media (and later academic) attention this brought was instrumental in the formation of a cultural policy that arguably sought to ape Paris and create world-class facilities and institutions and dynamise the economy of Barcelona, with the Raval as its focus in its creation of a cultural economy.¹³⁷

Within the wider Spanish context, there was an overall increase in investment in culture under Felipe González's Socialist government from 1982 to 1996; the Olympic year 1992 also sees the Seville Expo and Madrid's selection as European Capital of Culture. In terms of the Barcelona-Madrid rivalry, the choice of Madrid as the seat of the

¹³⁷ Joaquim Rius and Joan Subirats' *Del Xino al Raval* (Barcelona: Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, 2004), Ferran Mascarell's *Barcelona y la modernidad: La ciudad como proyecto de cultura* (Barcelona: Editorial Gedisa, 2008), Horacio Capel's *El modelo Barcelona: un examen crítico* (Barcelona: Ediciones del Serbal, 2005) and Tim Marshall's *Transforming Barcelona* (London: Routledge, 2004) and Resina's *Barcelona's Vocation of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008) all examine the profound changes that have affected Barcelona and the Raval in demographic, architectural and economical terms from the 1992 Olympics benchmark onwards.

Thyssen-Bornemisza collection in 1988 and subsequent home in the Palacio de Villahermosa (opened in 1992) and its promotion of artistic tourism in conjunction with the Museo del Prado and the Museo de la Reina Sofia (which also opened in the Olympic year) forced Barcelona to diversify and reinforce its cultural innovations to compete with the international prestige of Madrid's art collection.

This diversification of Barcelona cultural policy has manifested itself in various ways. In tune with the city's self-projection as the artistic polis of Southern Europe (showing no little ambition in its attempts to reach beyond the Pyrenees), a push for modernity, combined with various cultural planning projects such as Lluís Clotet's 1979 *Del Liceu al Seminari* resulted in the assignation and area that includes both the Eixample and the Raval bound by carrers Àngels, Carme, Valldonzella and Joaquim Costa as a 'culture node'.¹³⁸ Although Lluís Clotet's project comprised plans for the kilometre or so separating the Diocesan Seminary on carrer Balmes from the Liceu on La Rambla, the main core indicated above in the northern part of the Raval would combine cultural institutions, a university, galleries and museums as an impetus for economic regeneration. In the case of the Raval this has been achieved through various means.

Firstly, the project returned to urbanistic schemes suggested in the 1930s by collectives such as GATCPAC and the aforementioned development schemes proposed by the city council but never carried out. These involved in the first instance high-priority development such as slum demolition and rehousing, conversion of empty lots to public use and road rationalisation (e.g. Avinguda de les Drassanes and the creation of the Rambla del Raval as a focal point for the area). As a secondary objective, existing

¹³⁸ Lluís Clotet, 'Del Liceo al Seminario: Ordenación volumétrica de los espacios libres, equipamientos, residencia y edificios históricos de un sector del barrio de Raval en Barcelona', *Arquitectura COAM*, 62 (1981) 27-35.

cultural installations would be relocated to the Raval in an attempt to dynamise the economy through the disposal income of higher-income 'visitors'. In this section we find the re-homing of the Filmoteca de Catalunya from its previous home on Avinguda de Sarrià in the Eixample to a new home on the infamous carrer Robadors, the Conservatori del Liceu from its previous site on Via Laietana to a new building on carrer Nou de la Rambla and relocation of Barcelona University's History and Philosophy Faculty from high-income Pedralbes to carrer Montalegre in the Raval. In addition, new or renovated existing buildings would house cultural repositories and museums focused on modern and contemporary culture: two of the main examples are Richard Meier's 1990-95 Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona [MACBA] and Helio Piñón and Albert Viaplana's 1989-94 reconfiguration of the mid 18th-century Casa de Caritat into the Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona [CCCB], which along with the Rambla del Raval, have transformed the central part of the area. Other institutions that have made a home in the Raval include the Escola Massana arts school (in the Hospital de Santa Creu, next to the Biblioteca de Catalunya) and the Institut d'Estudis Catalans which has expanded from its location in the Hospital de Santa Creu complex to purpose-built premises on carrer Maria Aurèlia Capmany, very close to the Rambla del Raval development. Complementary to these more internally-orientated projects, there was a concerted effort to create high-end tourist- and conference-oriented accommodation and restaurants in the new spaces adjacent to the cultural installations and those opened up by urban intervention. Examples of this are the construction of the 11-storey Barceló Raval close to the Filmoteca and the renovation of the faded Fonda España into a gastronomic destination.

The completion of these projects has been both expensive and controversial, both in their execution and their resultant effects: evaluating the success of the projects

is difficult, and to a large extent beyond the scope of this thesis, although the 2004 document created for the CCCB by Joaquim Rius and Joan Subirats gives some judgment on the current situation of the Raval. The manner in which Barcelona city council has proceeded in its cultural revolution in the Raval (and indeed, in the rest of Barcelona) has been contentious; projects such as the creation of Rambla del Raval have involved the forced purchase (at lower than market rates) and subsequent razing of blocks of housing to create the wide pedestrian expanse of the Rambla del Raval.¹³⁹ This was initially part of a plan to ease traffic flow from the Eixample to the Port by extending carrer Muntaner through the Raval – the southern end of the scheme is extant in modern-day Avinguda de les Drassanes. However, the project was not completed, and Avinguda de les Drassanes now has unusually wide pavements and narrow traffic lanes, intended for a much heavier flow of vehicles.¹⁴⁰

This abortive traffic-easing project in the 1960s and 1970s echoes Haussmann's *grands boulevards* project in its intention to better link the city along road axes as a way of re-connecting the various parts of the city with the centre. This wider project of city improvement took on a different shade in the light of the awarding of the Olympics to Barcelona in 1986, which led to a wholesale transformation of the city in transport, housing and cultural infrastructure. These projects were signed by world-famous Catalan, Spanish and foreign architects in a bonanza of post-modern buildings. There has, however, been criticism that Barcelona has looked abroad too much in its search for stellar architecture at the expense of vernacular Catalan or Spanish talent. Rem Koolhaas refers to Barcelona as the first historic city that has become a generic

¹³⁹ The speculation and urbanistic and 'moral' refurbishment of the Raval is listed in greater detail in Manuel Delgado's *La ciudad mentirosa: fraude y miseria del 'modelo Barcelona'* (Madrid: Libros de la catarata, 2007), p. 60.

¹⁴⁰ See Ramon Soley, *Atles de Barcelona*, Vol. II, p.881 for an example.

metropolis due to the oversimplification of its own identity for the sake of international standards.¹⁴¹ As part of this process, the succession of large-scale, international ‘events’ as catalysts for urban renewal in Barcelona is well-documented,¹⁴² however, in the years after the Olympic Games, both infrastructural and cultural installations have taken on increasing importance in the regeneration of the city.

Within the context of the large-scale cultural and urban regeneration of the Raval, the reconstruction of the Liceu in the wake of the 1994 fire had a somewhat catalytic effect: the parlous state of the theatre, listed in Ignasi Solà-Morales’s report on theatres called *Plan de Rehabilitación de Teatros del siglo XIX*, identified that the theatre needed serious work in the areas of the stage, safety and in public comfort.¹⁴³ This was echoed by fellow architect Oriol Bohigas, in an open letter in the Catalan-language daily newspaper *Avui*:

Even if the theatre had not burnt down, the Liceu required urgent, indispensable reconstruction and expansion, and the modernisation of the stage and associated services that were now useless for modern theatrical montages.¹⁴⁴

The theatre was reflective of the run-down state of the surrounding Raval neighbourhood, which the wave of post-Olympic renovation had not yet reached.

In the days after the 1994 fire, while there was no doubt that Liceu would be rebuilt, there was an intense cultural debate about whether the Liceu should be rebuilt

¹⁴¹ Koolhaas, Rem, *La ciudad genérica* (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 2006), p.3.

¹⁴² Chapter 7 of *Barcelona’s Vocation of Modernity* is devoted to the kind of large-scale events that Barcelona strives to host, such as the 2004 Fòrum de les Cultures (199-235), as is Andrew J. Deisers’s *Barcelones/as: From Dictatorship to Democracy, from Modernity to Postmodernity* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana, 2005).

¹⁴³ Pla i Arxé, *Liceu: Un espai per a l’art*, p. 85.

¹⁴⁴ ‘Encara que no s’hagués cremat, les reformes i ampliacions eren urgents i indispensables, sobretot la modernització de l’escenari i serveis annexos, que era ja inservible per als muntatges teatrals moderns.’ Oriol Bohigas, open letter to Roger Alier, ‘El Liceu que volem (millorat) per al 1997’, *Avui*, 25 September 1994, p. 42.

in exactly the same fashion as before, or whether this was an opportunity to create something truly special. Some commentators like architects Ricard Bofill and Jaume Sanmartí, and musician Oriol Martorell suggested that the Liceu leave the centre, and have a new home in a purpose-built theatre.¹⁴⁵ These commentators rejected the reconstruction of the Liceu ‘come era, dove era’,¹⁴⁶ and instead called for an institution that would ‘fit in’ better with the modernisation and construction of the cultural facilities then underway, such as MACBA and the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya, amongst others, and sought to avoid a reconstruction of what was an famously archaic building that would end up as a pastiche. In an open letter written in *El País*, writer Eduardo Mendoza urged the public to be conscious of the degradation in cultural installations, and to consider the large projects that at the time were still half-finished, and whether the Liceu should become one of them. Interestingly, he called for the new theatre, in whatever shape or form, to be more representative of a modern Barcelona:

I do dare to note, amongst other possibilities, that of thinking of an opera theatre more appropriate to the times we are in and more in line with what Barcelona is; a less showy theatre, that does not intend to leave anybody open-mouthed, like the Opéra de la Bastille or the Opéra de Lyon, to quote some examples, but rather to offer musical and theatre shows that were just that: nothing less, but also nothing more, and where the splendour of the stairways and the drapes made room for quality, rigour, artistic honesty and, quite definitively, talent.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Pla i Arxé. *Liceu: un espai per a l'art* (Barcelona: Fundació Gran Teatre del Liceu, 1999) p. 90.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁴⁷ ‘Si me atrevo a apuntar, entre otras posibilidades, la de pensar en un teatro de ópera adecuado a los tiempos que corren y propocionado a lo que Barcelona es; un teatro menos aparatoso, que no pretenda dejar boquiabierto a nadie, a la manera de la Basilla, o de la Ópera de Lyon, por citar algun ejemplo, sino ofrecer espectáculos teatrales u musicales que fueran eso, nada menos, pero tampoco nada más, y donde el esplendor de las escalinatas y el cortinaje cediera el paso a la

This is likewise echoed in Oriol Bohigas's open letter to Roger Alier in *Avui*:

But I don't think I'm wrong in saying that the Liceu had become a bit stuck in the remains of a bourgeois taste and sociability that belonged to another time and musical trends that took it away from a more globalised culture. We might expect this audience, from here to 1997, to have changed somewhat. Surely the social life of the boxes will have disappeared in place of more authentic artistic interests, and I would like those 'in the know' – those until recently marginalised to the visual torture of being in the upper floors, to be able to totally enjoy the spectacle and as well as applauding the vocal exhibitions of these incredibly talented artists, demand better quality choirs, orchestras, sets and dancers.¹⁴⁸

Both open letters underline the opportunity provided by the fire to re-democratise the Liceu: Oriol Bohigas alludes to the disappearance of the social life of the boxes and the integration of the *galliner* attendees into the normalised fabric of Liceu goes. Mendoza recommends a theatre that dispenses with showy architecture to favour more public service – a cultural installation that is for the people, and the vast majority.

calidad, el rigor, la honestidad artística y, en definitiva, el talento. No recuperara un pasado perdido, sino aprovechar la experiencia del pasado para encarar el futuro. Eduardo Mendoza, 'Le reconstrucción del Liceu', *El País*, 3 February 1994
<http://elpais.com/diario/1994/02/03/opinion/760230014_850215.html> [accessed 25 February 2012]

¹⁴⁸ 'Però em sembla que no m'erro si dic que el Liceu s'havia quedat una mica enquistat en els residus d'un gust i d'una sociabilitat burgesa d'altres èpoques i, a més, en la persistència d'unes tendències musicals que l'allunyaven una mica d'una cultura més globalitzada. És d'esperar que aquest públic, d'aquí al 1997, hagi canviat una mica. Segurament la vida social de les llotges minvarà al servei d'uns interessos artístics més autèntics i m'agradaria que els «entesos» - fins ara marginats a les tortures visuals dels últims pisos – poguessin guardar plenament de l'espectacle i, a més d'aplaudir les exhibicions vocals dels superdotats, exigissin cors, orquestres, escenografies i dansaires d'una qualitat més suggestiva.' Oriol Bohigas, open letter to Roger Alier, 'El Liceu que volem (millorat) per al 1997', *Avui*, 25 September 1994, p. 42.

Nevertheless, the team chosen by the Generalitat for the reconstruction, Ignasi Solà-Morales, Xavier Fabré and Lluís Dilmé, supported by their colleagues Federico Correa and Oriol Bohigas, was composed of local architects who recognised the sense of rebuilding the theatre in its original location, both in terms of historical memory (a factor which should not be ignored) and of the coherence of the cultural planning schemes like *Del Liceu al Seminari*. The triumvirate of architects had been retained by the Liceu previously (from 1986 onwards) to draw up a Refurbishment and Extension plan (Plan de Reforma y Ampliación) that after the fire was renamed the Reconstruction and Extension plan. Although the 1990s cultural policy that created the MACBA and CCCB was arguably designed to redress an imbalance in heavyweight cultural institutions in Barcelona vis-à-vis Madrid, all the while helping to create a service and cultural economy in the Raval, the decision that the Liceu would stay in the Raval is significant for the cultural planning of the Raval; as well as being the bookend of Lluís Clotet's *Del Liceu al Seminari* scheme mentioned previously on p.114, it provides an unarguably central node for the cultural transformation of the Raval as a largely respected institution with considerable cultural weight within the city.

The obvious potential afforded by the destruction of the Liceu and the decision to keep the Liceu where it was provided a three-point plan for the architects that were to be resolved in the new building. Firstly, the small amount of historical remains that had been left largely intact by the fire could simply be restored. Secondly, the architects decided that the Liceu was not the place to recreate pastiches of 19th century architecture, and opted to recreate only the historic façade of the Liceu but use contemporary architecture for the expanded Rambla and Sant Pau façades. Finally, the physical difficulties of changing the auditorium's location and orientation, combined with the historical memory of the architecture and acoustics associated with it led the

architects to create an updated version. As such the architects specified that the Liceu would be almost tripled in size, from 12,000m² to 32,000m² and that the building about be around 70% completely new, but that the auditorium would be almost exactly the same in dimensions, acoustics and orientation, all the while rationalising the layout, while retaining a reduced number of boxes and replacing the ceiling paintings with creations by local artist Perejaume.¹⁴⁹ As such, the aggressive architectural internationalism of some of Barcelona's cultural institutions such as Meier's MACBA, Ramon Sanabria's Institut del Teatre or Ricard Bofill's Teatre Nacional de Catalunya (both 1996) is absent in the Liceu, however, and the decision to reconstruct the Liceu 'dove era' in 1994 turns the Liceu into the 'anchor tenant' of the cultural programme of the Raval as an institution that has been present historically and in the modern day.

Books that deal with the Liceu, such as Roger Alier's *El gran llibre del Liceu* (2004) and Ignasi de Solà-Morales's *L'arquitectura del Liceu* (2000), are frequently impressive in their anecdotal and/or technical detail of the Liceu; the former an appreciative study chronicling the history of the Liceu, the latter, a technically specific overview of the reconstruction of the theatre by the architects. Neither tome devotes discussion to immediate surroundings of the Liceu and the effect of the transformation of the theatre on the Raval. This lack of interaction arises similarly in the other direction; the renovation of the Raval has borne literature describing the substantial physical and socio-demographic changes, but on few occasions is there any discussion of the relationship of the Raval to the already existing institutions in the area. For example, the Liceu is notable by its absence from the 2004 study commissioned by the Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona [CCCB] of the changes that have taken

¹⁴⁹ Ignasi Solà-Morales, 'El proyecto de reconstrucción y ampliación', *Barcelona Metròpolis Mediterrània*, No. 48 (Especial Liceu), 1999. <http://www.bcn.cat/publicacions/bmm/48/cs_el9_sola.htm> [accessed 5 November 2012]

place in the Raval over the last decades. *Del Xino al Raval: Cultura i transformació a la Barcelona central*, edited by Joaquim Rius and Joan Subirats discusses in great detail the demographic and urbanistic changes that the Raval has undergone, including a detailed account of the cultural changes, making reference to the various cultural institutions and the growth of cultural industries in the area. Nevertheless, the discussion of theatre in the Raval and indeed in the greater Barcelona context makes barely any mention of the Liceu.¹⁵⁰ There is only a passing reference to the theatre's elitist connotations, denoting an 'urbeme' for more convenient partitioning of the Raval. In the same vein, Jaume Casanova's 2003 book *Ciutat Vella, ciutat construïda*¹⁵¹ is a charting of the enormous physical changes that took place between 1988 and 2002, but again, there is no mention of the Liceu, except in a mention of the *Del Liceu al Seminari* scheme. Although the book is more devoted to a description of new housing and leisure facilities, it does mention the conversion of the Casa de la Caritat into the CCCB and the construction of MACBA.

Although arguably it is not the remit of these publications to 'promote' the Liceu in any way, their omission of it is remarkable, as if the CCCB study were suggesting that the Liceu is not part of 'Raval culture'. Indeed, the study draws on the contrast between the Liceu as a link to the elites of the city and the immediate urbeme, citing the highest levels of unemployment and the lowest income in the Raval.¹⁵² This, however, is the only mention of the Liceu that is not merely a geographic reference point. Given this lack of interrelation, one could then suppose that the Liceu is irrelevant to the

¹⁵⁰ Joan Subirats and Joaquim Rius, *Del Xino al Raval: Cultura i transformació a la Barcelona central* (Barcelona: Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, 2004). <http://www.cccb.org/rcs_gene/raval.pdf> [accessed 24 May 2011], p. 56.

¹⁵¹ Jaume Casanova, ed., *Ciutat Vella, ciutat reconstruïda* (Barcelona: El Cep i la Nansa Edicions, 2003), p. 33.

¹⁵² Subirats, Joan and Joaquim Rius, *Del Xino al Raval: Cultura i transformació a la Barcelona central*, p. 33.

publication's intended audiences and to the inhabitants of the Raval itself. What is perhaps more likely is that the Liceu and its connotations fall outside the intended identity of the Raval in its renovated economy. The cultural institutions that have taken up residence in the Raval are arguably aimed at consolidating Barcelona's 'vocation of modernity', to borrow the title of Joan Ramon Resina's book. In contrast to the commodification of Barcelona's historical landmarks that has taken place in Ciutat Vella and the Eixample, with the promotion of the (original and mock-) medieval core and the later *modernista* architectural heritage respectively, the promotion of the Raval, both to tourists and locals, has focussed on the transition of the Raval from marginal slum to contemporary cultural and economic node. As such, the names of the institutions are fundamental to this projection; Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona and Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona connote the intended modernity of the Raval and the accompanying socio-demographic of young artists and professionals at the vanguard of the cultural industries, consolidated through the construction of university campuses and visual arts facilities.

Arguably the focus on visual arts is designed to provide the most obvious (and perhaps superficial) results; the stellar, insistently modern architecture of MACBA and the CCCB is a potent metaphor of the supposedly radical change that has taken place in the Raval, an echo of the 'cure-all' for urban ills arguably started by the Lincoln Center and Centre Pompidou. It is difficult to say whether theatre connotes the same superficial change. In Barcelona, at least, the construction of theatres has not gone hand-in-hand with the regeneration of urban spaces: Poble Sec, the area around the Ciutat del Teatre and the Paral·lel theatre district has until recently not 'enjoyed' the same transformation as the Raval, and the shapeless, semi-urbanised area surrounding the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya and L'Auditori is perhaps compelling evidence of this. This

is starting to change in 2012/2013, with various plans to rejuvenate the Paral·lel theatres (such as the Teatre Arnau, and the refurbishment of El Molino, completed in 2010), and the opening of the reconstructed Encants flea market adjacent to the Teatre Nacional, but these are piecemeal cases that have not provoked a more widespread, organic (i.e. privately-funded) development. This is not to detract from the contributions of the various theatres to Barcelona's cultural scene, but rather to note that theatres do not necessarily engender or connote urban regeneration in and of themselves. In the context of the other buildings in the Raval designated as 'gentrifiers', it is perhaps unfair to expect the Liceu to have had the same effect. Arguably, community-level theatre is provided by other theatres, for example, the Teatre del Raval, el Nou Tantarantana, and Llantiol Cafè-Teatre.

However, an important consideration with regards to the theatres' work in the Raval is their intended audiences; the CCCB report makes reference to the various small nationality-specific ghettos that have come to be in the Raval; the Filipino ghetto of carrer Riera Alta and the Pakistani concentrations around carrer Carretes and carrer Joaquim Costa are two mentioned, but the northern part of the Raval around remains the haunt of international and home artists, young professionals from the creative industries: these are to all intents and purposes the intended audiences of the aforementioned community-specific theatres like the Raval, Tantarantana and Llantiol.

THE MODERN POLITICAL THEATRES: TEATRE NACIONAL DE CATALUNYA AND THE CIUTAT DEL TEATRE

In the wider context of Barcelona theatre provision, the place of the Liceu within the larger spectrum has been heavily defined in relation to the construction of two

competing theatre complexes in the late 1990s and early 2000s; the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya and the Ciutat del Teatre, resulting in Barcelona suffering from the tensions produced by the differing remit and political provenance of the different theatre complexes. On one hand, the city council-sponsored (i.e. run by the Socialist Party of Catalonia until 2011, when ousted by CiU) 'Ciutat del Teatre' in Montjuïc makes use of the *noucentista* buildings of the 1929 Universal Exposition. It is, nevertheless, in an undoubtedly marginal (in geographic terms) part of the city sandwiched between the steep hillside of Montjuïc and the densely-populated barri of Poble Sec. On the other hand, at the northern end of the city, the (CiU) Generalitat's project of the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya has been criticised for the imposition of a 'cultural node' comprised of Ricard Bofill's monolithic steel-and-glass mock-Parthenon, the Archive of the Crown of Aragon and the L'Auditori concert hall in the brownfield area near Plaça de les Glòries which the Encants street market had previously inhabited.¹⁵³ Helena Buffery suggests that neither 'theatrical pole' has engaged with the wider public in the way planned:¹⁵⁴ for all the debate surrounding their construction and purported usefulness in the projection of (a nationalist) identity in Catalonia, it is tempting to suggest that they cannot compete with a theatre like the Liceu in terms of visibility. The Ciutat del Teatre, with its site at the foot of Montjuïc enjoys neither the romanticism of the Teatre Grec and its gardens, nor the monumental visibility of the Palau Nacional, home to the National Art Museum of Catalonia. The curved building of the Teatre Lliure (since the re-opening of the Gràcia space called Teatre Lliure Montjuïc) sits across a

¹⁵³ For more on the subject, see Helena Buffery, 'Theatre Space and Cultural Identity in Catalonia', *Romance Quarterly*, 53.3 (2006) 195-209.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

'hard square'¹⁵⁵ from the Mercat de les Flors and the Institut del Teatre. The Mercat de les Flors (recently celebrating its 25th anniversary) is generally considered to be a successful conversion of the old flower market into a performance space that has managed to escape the political tarbrushing that has gone on with Convergència i Unió's Teatre Nacional de Catalunya and the Socialist City Council Ciutat del Teatre project.¹⁵⁶ As part of the same complex and built in very close proximity to the Mercat, the Institut de Teatre stands monolithically facing the mountain of Montjuïc and Plaça Margarida Xirgu. With its back to the surrounding Poble Sec, and is poorly integrated into the urban fabric. Coming from Poble Sec, the access to the theatre complex is through a none-too-obvious sliding door and up a steep hill which acts as a car park for the Institut. Likewise, the main access to the theatre complex and the Plaça Margarida Xirgu doubles up as car park and home for recycling containers. Essentially, the cluster of buildings forms an almost-closed circle at the edge of the city, bearing little architectural relation to the area in which it sits.

In the same vein, the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya, for all its transparent aesthetic, looks not to the city and region or country it serves, but out to sea; perhaps a reflection of its international ambition. Again, the location of the theatre is problematic: stuck between the slip roads and traffic of Plaça de les Glòries and Avinguda Meridiana, the Teatre is once again wedged into an awkward triangular plot, and the monolithic Bofill-designed building (described as a 'grand mausoleum' by Maria Delgado)¹⁵⁷ seems

¹⁵⁵ 'Plaça dura' – a term referring to the Ajuntament's policy of reducing costs in public spaces by merely concreting them over, as opposed to the more expensive option of green – see Llätzer Moix's *La ciudad de los arquitectos* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 1994) for more on the subject.

¹⁵⁶ For more on this particular aspect, see Lourdes Orozco's 'Politics, Culture and Urban Regeneration: The Mercat de les Flors, Barcelona's 'Forgotten' Theatre', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 17.3 (2007), 357-369.

¹⁵⁷ Maria Delgado, *'Other' Spanish Theatres: Erasure and Inscription on the Twentieth-Century Spanish Stage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 166.

out of place in what is a largely ex-industrial, residential area that (despite numerous interventions) lacks a traditional central commercial node and possibly as a result, lacks a concrete identity. As such, the glass façade of the building ends up ringing of patronising cultural architecture, screened off from the surrounding heterogeneous, mixed-use area by a wall of cypresses.

As noted by Maria Delgado, the tensions between the Generalitat of Convergència i Unió and the City Council of the Partit Socialista de Catalunya have tended to manifest themselves in public spheres, especially in matters of culture,¹⁵⁸ hence the rivalry between the TNC and Ciutat del Teatre projects. Despite their aspirations to ‘fer país’ (‘to make a country’ i.e. to build a nation, to borrow ex-Generalitat President Jordi Pujol’s expression), there appears to be little public affection for the somewhat monolithic institutions; instead of ‘consolidating existing, functioning centres with proven connections to the urban environment’,¹⁵⁹ the theatres’ lack of integration into the urban fabric precludes any kind of direct citizen engagement with the institutions, and as such any kind of collective emotional reaction. The theatres’ pretensions of enshrining a particular cultural identity are sabotaged by their inorganic, poorly defined location.

By comparison, the reopening of the Teatre Lliure Gràcia in the 2010-2011 season has been welcome news; opened in 1976 in the premises previously occupied by the Cooperativa La Lleialtat de Gràcia, the more popular nature of the Teatre Lliure, (insofar as it has been a home and nurturing ground for some of Catalonia’s best-known actors) as well as its integration into the urban fabric on carrer Montseny in Gràcia and its long history in the area (not to mention its publicly-accessible bar) stands as a

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁵⁹ Helena Buffery, ‘Theatre Space and Cultural Identity in Catalonia’, *Romance Quarterly*, 53 (2007), 195–209 p. 203.

counterweight to the abovementioned attempted centralisation of theatre, and as such the theatre enjoys a reputation for independent theatre for the city, although as main tenants in the Ciutat del Teatre project, is not entirely disassociated from this centralisation.

Quite apart from the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya and the Teatres Lliure differing approaches in their representation of Catalan identity, the theatres arguably do not provide a 'social forum' for the city in the same way that the Liceu was perceived to;¹⁶⁰ one might argue that this function ended with the 'democratisation' of the Liceu in the late 1980s, when the Consorci del Liceu took control of the running of the institution from the 'joint-stock' model. Even if one takes into account that the Liceu no longer performs this overtly social function, either within the city, or for Catalonia in general, historical memory arguably lends weight to the perceived role of the theatre as a societal nexus through the perception of its prestige as a leading opera house and representative of the city.

CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, it is not unreasonable to state that the Liceu's physical and geographical centrality is key to its place within the city's imaginary; considered one of the most important buildings in the old city, the Liceu's own particular class associations (both in relation to the *galliner* and the Cercle del Liceu) and the importance of historical memory in its present incarnation allude to the centrality and persistent prestige of the institution to the city in the early 2000s. Even in the age of cheap short-haul travel and hostelling, the Liceu still features in city guidebooks such as

¹⁶⁰ Gary McDonogh writes extensively on this topic in *Good Families of Barcelona: A Social History of Power in the Industrial Era* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

Lonely Planet and Rough Guide for its importance as an opera house, although it perhaps plays second-fiddle to the striking architecture of the Palau de la Música. It is precisely in this city-wide context that the Liceu's importance is clear; closer to home, the Liceu's relationship in an urban and a sociological context to the Raval is more ambivalent. Despite the close quarters, it is difficult to gauge how much the two interrelate. Nevertheless, just as literature concerning the Raval frequently perpetuates its marginal character, fetishising its character as a place for the poor and deprived, but the figure of the Liceu remains as a kind of unspoken constant, always in the background; *Barcelona, mapa d'ombres*, discussed in the 'Modern Psychogeographies' section of the Chapter 1 (pp. 56-66), is an example of this.

Perhaps then, one must accept the peculiarity of the Liceu as part of its nature; a bastion of perceived 'upper-class' culture physically integrated into one of the most deprived areas of the city, which has its own peculiarities both urbanistically and demographically. But to say that the Liceu has no relationship to the Raval is erroneous and the theatre is often a looming presence in the cultural and literary representations of the area. As discussed in Chapter 1, the concept of the *galliner* and its 'lower-class' connotation are an essential facet of the historical Liceu experience. The changes in the Raval's demographic make-up, and the physical transformation (and democratisation in terms of the class structure, it could be argued) of the theatre itself have irrevocably changed the relationship between institution and area.

It might then be considered fortunate that the historic theatres and venues of Barcelona have, to a certain extent, existed beyond the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya/Ciutat del Teatre rivalry; in recent years these institutions have become weapons in the struggles between the Socialist Ajuntament and the 'Convergent' Generalitat; it remains to be seen how *Convergència i Unió's* victory in the Ajuntament

in 2011 will affect the various cultural institutions in the city both in light of their allegiances to some institutions and not others and the ever-present need for funding cuts.

Despite the fortunate geographical position of the Liceu, it is not the only factor in the opera house's continuing success and renown both in Barcelona and on the wider European stage. The geographical location of the Gran Teatre del Liceu on la Rambla gives it very high visibility in terms of being on a highly-visited tourist thoroughfare, and historically one of the city's main boulevards for social interaction. However, the theatre is physically integrated with the Raval, and in a sense, therefore, inextricable from it. The peculiar demographic of the Raval, largely down to its geography and social history, does not detract from the area's very centrality to the city. Whilst historically beyond the historic core of Barcelona, it now comes to function as a kind of dark mirror of Ciutat Vella's supposedly more salubrious conditions, and is considered an inseparable part of contemporary Barcelona's city centre. Thus the Liceu enjoys an centrality on several levels: while the ancient centre of the city might be sited several hundred metres to the north-east on Plaça Sant Jaume, the service, cultural and touristic economy has arguably shifted to a corridor that runs from Passeig de Gràcia, across Plaça de Catalunya and down la Rambla to the port. The Liceu's location in the middle of the La Rambla sector is complemented by its central location within the modern-day district of Ciutat Vella, mirroring the theatre's historic social centrality to the city. While this chapter and Chapter 2 have sought to place the Liceu within various socio-geographic contexts, the ways in which the Liceu seeks to interact with the immediate surrounding area and the larger city on a more personal level to recuperate this historical social centrality through marketing strategies and branding will be explored in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4: EL LICEU DE TOTS: MANAGEMENT, PROGRAMMING AND POLITICS

It is worth noting that the Liceu has featured in a largely peripheral manner in studies of Barcelona's cultural scene and cultural politics. Critical studies of cultural policy, such as Lourdes Orozco's *Teatro y Política: Barcelona 1980-2000* (Madrid: Publicaciones de la Asociación de Directores Españoles, 2007), Kathryn Crameri's *Catalonia: National Identity and Cultural Policy 1980-2003* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), Joan Ramon Resina's *Barcelona's Vocation of Modernity: Rise and Decline of an Urban Image* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008) and Manuel Delgado's *La ciudad mentirosa: Fraude y miseria del 'modelo Barcelona'* (Madrid: Los libros de la catarata, 2007) have explored the heavily politicised relationship between theatre, culture, architecture and politics in the early 21st century in Catalonia. Rarely, however, do they mention the Liceu beyond mere contextualisation of the Barcelona theatre scene (Although *Barcelona's Vocation of Modernity* has a chapter devoted to the Liceu, it focusses more on the theatre's societal role in the past and the connotations of its construction rather than its modern-day function.) Although at first glance the Liceu may seem to exist outside the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya/Teatre Lliure binary and its associated politics, the opera house is as subject to interferences and influence from the various levels of government as the more openly-affiliated institutions.

To this end, an understanding of the cultural policies implemented in Catalonia since the restoration of democracy is essential to contextualising the position of the Liceu within a complex web of political and municipal interests in a city that managed to completely create a cultural economy in little more than twenty years.

In addition, this chapter will explore how the Liceu has projected itself throughout Catalonia, Spain and abroad through its marketing strategies and

programming. It will consider whether the Liceu has sacrificed the promotion of local talent for international visibility as part of a concerted effort to remain amongst an elite group of international opera houses that are synonymous with musical and technical quality, such as Milan's La Scala, Paris's Opéra Garnier or New York's Metropolitan Opera, or, whether the theatre has been able to achieve a balance between the two. As such, the chapter will attempt to define precisely what the Liceu's remit is in terms of cultural projection, and should this be the case, whether it fulfils its own goals in terms of combining its international projection and representation of local Barcelona and Catalan culture.

A discussion of the Liceu in recent times cannot omit a mention of the strategies adopted by the theatre to face the severe recession that Spain has been undergoing since 2008. The reduction of funding from the public bodies that fund the Liceu since the recession began, in addition to a sharp VAT increase in Autumn 2012, have created serious monetary issues for the theatre, leading to the announcement of a temporary closure in March/April and June/July 2011,¹⁶¹ referred to as an ERE (*Expediente de Regulación de Empleo* – Employment Regulation Measure). This chapter will discuss the issues raised by this event, which led the Liceu workforce to question the tactics and rationale of the executive director, Joan Francesc Marco, and provoked a public debate in the press as to the viability of an expensive art form such as opera in times of financial difficulty on both macro- and micro-economic scales in Spain.

Since the reopening of the theatre on the 7th October 1999, the Liceu has attempted to maintain the dual strands for which it is perhaps best known historically; its status as a 'teatre de veus' (theatre of voices) and a reputation for

¹⁶¹ Núria Cuadrado, 'El ERE del Liceu ya tiene fechas', *El Mundo*, 1 February 2012
<<http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2012/02/01/barcelona/1328101403.html>> [accessed 9 August 2013]

staging new productions energetically. However, the theatre has made a concerted effort to draw on the rich theatre vein that post-dictatorship Catalonia has to offer in an attempt to produce novel works that bring different productions to the Liceu audience. In addition the chapter will describe the complex background to the Liceu's management profile and the various interests that are at play at the theatre in terms of the governmental structures that affect both the Liceu's management and the artistic programming directly.

UN TEATRE DE VEUS: REFASHIONING THE PROGRAMMING TRADITIONS OF THE FRANCO REGIME

At the beginning of the Civil War, with Barcelona declared as Republican, the Liceu was nationalised as the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya in 1936. The onomastics here are clear; this was a theatre that was to represent a nation fighting for its autonomy. By changing its name, the Republicans arguably sought to erase the Liceu's bourgeois past and thrust it forward as a symbol and home of a new Catalan culture. Unfortunately, this new status was not to last, and as soon as the Civil War ended, the theatre was predictably restored to its previous regime of fragmented, shared ownership. This system carried on thus until the 1970s. For the bourgeoisie, the uncertainty of the Civil War had ended and their theatre was restored to them, albeit now with the obligation to hear and salute the national anthem at the beginning of each performance.¹⁶²

It was during these years that the Liceu practised a kind of cultural subversion against the Francoist regime, which closely monitored cultural output in the 1950s,

¹⁶² Ramon Pla i Arxé, *Liceu: Un espai per a l'art* (Barcelona: Lunwerg Editores, 1999), p. 195.

1960s and 1970s until the dictator's death in November 1975.¹⁶³ However, since the regime did not pursue a particular aesthetic ideal apart from classical and reactionary styles of art, the theatre was able to use its status as one of Spain's principal and more importantly, most international theatres to bring in a cosmopolitan, vanguard, European programming that stood in opposition to the largely monolithic, popular culture of Francoist Spain. Prominent examples include Roberto Rossellini's *Jeanne d'Arc au Bûcher* and a production of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* (both in the 1954-55 season). In addition to the modern works that had their Spanish premiere at the Liceu such as Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* (1964) and *Lulu* (1969), as well as Brecht and Weill's *Mahagonny* (1971) and Britten's *Billy Budd* (1975), a gradual introduction of Catalan works into the repertoire took place in the 1950s. This initiative took a small step towards reflecting the local culture that was largely prohibited on a public level until the 1970s: *El Canigó* (1952), adapted from Jacint Verdaguer's epic poem and Santiago Rusiñol's novel on Barcelona life *L'auca del Senyor Esteve* (1956), two essential works of Catalan writing, were produced musically at the Liceu under the auspices of Joan Antoni Pàmies (the Liceu's *empresari* from 1947 to his death in 1980, equivalent to an executive director during the period of private ownership).¹⁶⁴ The theatre extended its ambitions beyond Catalan productions in 1955 when the Wagner Festival visited the opera house — the first time that the festival had been produced outside its home in Bayreuth. At the time Germany was looking to revive its international cultural prestige

¹⁶³ Roger Alier's *El gran llibre del Liceu* (Barcelona: Carroggio, 1999) has more information on this topic. For a more broad overview, see Manuel Abellán, *Censura y creación literaria (1939-1976)* (Barcelona: Ediciones 62, 1980), or Jordi Cornellà-Detrell's recent publication *Literature as a Response to Cultural and Political Repression in Franco's Catalonia* (London: Tamesis, 2011).

¹⁶⁴ Antoni Massana's 1934 opera of *Canigó* based on Josep Carner's libretto was brought to the Liceu by writer Antoni Pelegrí i Partagàs. More information on the 1952 production can be found in Llorenç Soldevila's article 'Fortuna musical i dramaturgic de Canigó, de Jacint Verdaguer', *Anuari Verdaguer*, 19 (2011), 499-517
<<http://www.raco.cat/index.php/AnuariVerdaguer/article/view/262429/349641>> [accessed 4 August 2013]

after the Second World War and Spain provided an ideal place for this to take place, having been nominally neutral in the conflict. The visit of the Festival and the international calling it connoted meant that the Liceu had played a part in cementing its own (and by extension, Barcelona's) reputation for cultural cosmopolitanism and openness. The choice of Barcelona as the opera tour's stopping-off point rather than Madrid is something of an indicator of the Catalan city's cultural externally-orientated weight and standing, as opposed to the more traditional culture of the capital.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the theatre developed a concept of a 'theatre of voices' as a fundamental part of the Liceu's external image: the theatre was to be an auditorium and a home for the 'greatest' voices in opera. Such a measure, as pointed out by Joan Matabosch in his speech 'El Nou Liceu' to the Foment de les Arts in May 1994 was a product of mere necessity.¹⁶⁵ During the financial difficulties that Spain had suffered during the 1950s, partly due to the country's own self-imposed international exclusion,¹⁶⁶ the theatre struggled to maintain a balance between singers, choir and orchestra. Ramon Pla i Arxé notes, however, that the Liceu did not receive any public funding during the Franco period.¹⁶⁷ Having seen the success of vocalists like Renata Tebaldi on her visits to the Liceu, Joan Antoni Pàmies made a calculated decision to let the choir and orchestra decline in quality, and in their place decided to concentrate on the quality of the artists invited, thereby creating a kind of diva worship as the singers became the soul of the opera and enhanced the Liceu's reputation for attracting the

¹⁶⁵ Joan Matabosch, 'El Liceu Nou', given at the 'El Gran Teatre del Liceu: l'òpera dels 90' conference, Foment de les Arts Decoratives, 31 May 1994, p. 54.

¹⁶⁶ Paul Heywood's *The Government and Politics of Spain* (London: Macmillan, 1995), David Gilmour's *The Transformation of Spain: From Franco to the Constitutional Monarchy* (London: Quartet Books, 1985) and Paul Preston's *Spain in Crisis: The Evolution and Decline of the Franco Régime* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1976) all detail Spain's self-imposed cultural and economic autarky during the 1940s and beyond.

¹⁶⁷ Pla i Arxé, *Liceu: Un espai per a l'art*, p. 195.

finest international artists. The Liceu could ill-afford the *Gesamtkunstwerk* concept of opera that demanded a certain standard of technical quality in staging, orchestra and chorus, so decided to follow a programme of contracting stellar voices, giving them a showcase for their voices with minimum competition from the chorus and orchestra. As Matabosch notes, in encouraging this kind of emotionally charged venue-singer link, Pàmies changed the Liceu's relationship with its singers. The theatre created relationships that went beyond mere professionalism to encourage an exaltedly sentimental relationship with singers like Montserrat Caballé (premiered in 1962 with Strauss's *Arabella*) and Victòria de los Ángeles (premiering in 1945 in *The Marriage of Figaro*).¹⁶⁸ These artists came to 'belong' to the Liceu, and each of their performances came to function almost as a homecoming for the divas. Using as a programming base the fandom that these singers brought to the Liceu, Pàmies fostered a concentration of talented voices: the theatre gave young Spanish singers like Josep Carreras and Plácido Domingo some of their first operatic roles (Carreras in Falla's *El retablo de Maese Pedro* at the age of eleven 1958 and Domingo in 1966 in the operas *Carlota*, *Severino* and *La Mulata de Córdoba* with the Mexican National Opera). Nevertheless, Pàmies's system of relying on the artists to carry the theatre without any meaningful investment in sets or orchestras led the theatre into a definitively decadent period during the 1970s, which suffered from an overexposure to certain favourite guests that were the mainstay of the programme. Writer Terenci Moix described the decadent state of the Liceu in an article in the Barcelona daily newspaper *La Vanguardia* in 1978:

¹⁶⁸ Matabosch, 'El Liceu Nou', p. 55.

Opera, understood as a total work of art, is absent from Barcelona's Liceu, where unsatisfactory staging and a completely backward concept of *mise-en-scène* reign.¹⁶⁹

Moix's article 'El Liceo como problema cultural', published in March 1978, was a criticism of the Liceu's perceived decadence and growing irrelevance in the years after Franco's death in November 1975. In the years during which Spain was in the thrall of new democratic elections, and a new Constitution was being drawn up, the Liceu was seen as an out-of-date institution that was neither the popular theatre of previous years, in that it neither attracted the wide sociodemographic spectrum it had in the past nor was it considered a novel, or even quality opera house as shown in Moix's column.¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, it was not considered an adequate representation of Spain's newly-embraced democratic values and the changing cultural scene of the period, in which novel forms were moving out of established venues into more avant-garde spaces (such as the street, for example). However, the Liceu's programming and cultural policy seems to have reached its apex with the Bayreuth Festival in 1955 and since then had contented itself with safe artists and productions. For several years after Franco's passing, it seems that the Liceu was (perhaps unfairly) associated with the privileged Francoist, Spanish-speaking elite – novelist Eduardo Mendoza pulls no punches with his assertion that:

The Liceu was the bastion of a reactionary, out-dated bourgeoisie, whose memory we should not be associated with: the other face of the mass graves at Montjuïc, and the symbol of what the people of Barcelona have

¹⁶⁹ 'La ópera, entendida como arte total, permanece ausente del Liceo barcelonés, donde privan los montajes deficientes y una concepción completamente retrógrada de la puesta en escena'.

Terenci Moix, 'El Liceo como problema cultural', *La Vanguardia*, 3 March 1978, p.6.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

always wanted to eradicate from here [...] to say that the Liceu was a stronghold of Francoism is to put it lightly: it was largely the bourgeoisie that frequented the Liceu that financed the bombs that the Francoists aimed at Barcelona and the rest of Spain.¹⁷¹

This said, the international prestige of the Liceu and its ability to attract the best singers and directors to Barcelona was not in doubt: Roger Alier, in his *Destino* article entitled 'El Liceu desde fuera y desde dentro' counts it amongst the New York Metropolitan, Covent Garden, La Scala and so on in terms of this quality.¹⁷² Nevertheless, in the 1970s the theatre was recognised as being antiquated both in terms of its governmental structure (at this time it was still under private ownership) and its physical existence. A large part of the Liceu's problem and part of the reason it was felt to be in crisis was that it had simply not modernised and evolved in line with the profound social changes Spain was undergoing: it had failed to encapsulate the sentiment of post-Franco Spain which would eventually manifest itself in the kaleidoscopic *movida madrileña*, the *sine qua non* of 1980s Spain, but without forgetting Barcelona's own period of radical cultural renaissance, captured in Ventura Pons's film *Ocaña, retrato intermitente* (1978). During this period, the Liceu struggled to maintain the glory of the previous decades and suffered a slow decadence, surviving seemingly on singer and audience loyalty, rather than innovative stagings or programming. More on this period can be found in Ferran Freixa's *El foc, darrer acte* (Barcelona: Ajuntament de Barcelona, 1996), which

¹⁷¹ 'El Liceu fue un reducto de una burguesía reaccionaria y carca, con cuyo recuerdo no deberíamos sentirnos identificados, la otra cara de las fosas de Montjuïc y, en suma, el símbolo de lo que el pueblo de Barcelona siempre quiso erradicar de nuestro suelo [...] afirmar que el Liceu fue un reducto franquista es poco decir: fue en buena parte la burguesía que frecuentaba el Liceo la que financió las bombas que las fuerzas franquistas arrojaron sobre Barcelona y sobre el resto de España'. Eduardo Mendoza, 'La reconstrucción del Liceu', *El País*, 3 February 1994 <http://elpais.com/diario/1994/02/03/opinion/760230014_850215.html> [accessed 25 February 2012]

¹⁷² Roger Alier, 'El Liceo desde fuera y desde dentro', *Destino*, 2019, 9-15 March 1978, (19-22) p. 20.

details the years previous to the 1994 fire, and forms a kind of photoreportage of the wreckage caused by the fire.

EL LICEU DE TOTS: 'DE TOTS' OR 'DE TOTA LA VIDA' ('EVERYBODY'S LICEU' OR 'AS IT ALWAYS HAS BEEN')

In an attempt to restore the Liceu back to a sense of 'public ownership' in the sense of making the theatre a part of the public imaginary, the 'el Liceu de tots' ('Everybody's Liceu') scheme was created after the reconstruction in 1999. The project became something of an umbrella word to describe what the Liceu's modernisation meant for both the theatre and its intended audience. The Liceu's position as one of Barcelona and Catalonia's most important theatres gives a special relevance to the 'Liceu de tots' slogan: unlike the clear affiliations of the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya and the Teatre Lliure, both creatures of their respective political parties (Convergència i Unió and the Socialist Party of Catalonia), the Liceu attempts to identify with its public and its city, rather than any political party, hence 'Everybody's Liceu'. Although the Liceu is still subject to the whims of cultural politics, the 'Liceu de tots' attempts to transcend mere populist marketing to denote that the Liceu strives to operate above and beyond mere politics, and reaffirms that the Liceu belongs to the citizenry in spirit, as far as it can. In the burst of culture and cultural investment that followed the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, there was various strands to the Catalan political and 'El Liceu de tots' movement; culture that was national (i.e. Catalan), popular, and modern. Barcelona's physical and cultural renovation was spearheaded by large infrastructure investments such as the MACBA modern art museum, the CCCB contemporary culture museum and the TNC national theatre project. These projects brought together international and local talent;

foreign architects to rejuvenate run-down areas, re-appropriating old disused buildings for civic use and providing the city with an infrastructure of modern performance buildings that would appropriately reflect the status of theatre in Catalonia. The three buildings mentioned above are glassed-panelled spaces that are physically transparent, or at least freely accessible, in an awkward metaphor for what they stand for: high-quality, accessible culture for all, at the service of the people. This is precisely the kind of current that the 'Liceu de tots' initiative was attempting to tap into: the excitement that accompanied the highly-visible creation of culture for the city. The 1994 fire gave Barcelona the opportunity to renovate the Liceu, both physically and in terms of what the building connoted to the citizenry, making it part of the overall (re)creation of the city's culture. This was a chance to reintegrate and normalise the Liceu as a cultural nexus for all, not just for the rich, as had been the association in the past. Independently of the complex political background of the Liceu, the theatre has, since its reopening in 1999, had an active programme that has sought to modernise and restore the theatre in a symbolic way to the citizens of Barcelona as 'their' theatre. In a presentation at the Foment de les Arts Decoratives in 1994, a few months after the Liceu burnt down, the newly-appointed assistant artistic director Joan Matabosch called for the theatre to become less of an 'exhibition' site, but more of a place of productions; a site for the creation of opera.¹⁷³ This required a greater input from the world of theatre, as well as a new focus on new directors to bring about new re-interpretations, and Matabosch criticised the Liceu's 'measly attempts' to reach out to the theatre world to bring in fresh visions.¹⁷⁴ Catalan theatre in the 1990s had plenty of local collectives that had a lot to bring to the table. Matabosch alludes to the lack of presence of local Catalan and

¹⁷³ 'Minsos intents', Joan Matabosch, 'El Liceu Nou', p. 59.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

Barcelona talent at the Liceu in terms of stage direction, naming directors like Lluís Pasqual or the acting troupes of the 1980s and 1990s, such as Els Comediants, as a totally unacceptable situation. In a moment when Catalan culture was buoyant both in the city and in the wider international context thanks to the projection afforded by the Olympic Games, the fact that the city's own opera house was not involved in the creation of local culture seemed out of step with the cultural movement of the time. Matabosch closed his paper with a warning that without definitive action and greater external collaboration that opera risked turning into 'a well made-up mummy', with little cultural content beyond mere the repetition of tried-and-tested material of the Pàmies years.¹⁷⁵

Since taking full control of the artistic direction in 1998, Matabosch has taken the Liceu into the era of international co-productions (ever more the fashion for opera houses, given the opportunity to share production costs and pool talent), and has instigated a concerted programme of staging works that reflect Catalan talent in whatever shape it comes against a fiercely internationalist background. To this end, the Liceu has collaborated with local artists from performance, direction, and artistic backgrounds. These include sculptor Jaume Plensa, stage director Calixto Bieito, playwright-director Sergi Belbel, the Lliure's Lluís Pasqual and Àlex Rigola, director and curator Xavier Albertí and members of Catalonia's high profile performance companies La Fura dels Baus and Comediants. The following chapter will explore this programming strategy in further detail, exploring three works from the Liceu's recent programme that illustrate Matabosch's commitment to local talent as a way of re-presenting the Liceu as an institution in public ownership, not only financially, but in the public imaginary.

¹⁷⁵ 'Una momia ben maquillada'. Joan Matabosch, 'El Liceu Nou', p.60.

The *Turandot* that was to be performed when the theatre burnt down in 1994 was re-staged as the first production to open the renovated theatre in 1999, and was directed by one of Catalonia's most important actresses and directors – Nuria Espert. Her vision of the opera, which was to be performed in 1994 when the theatre burnt down, was the first opera to grace the new stage in 1999 after a costly, albeit needed, reconstruction, and was restaged in 2009 to mark a decade since the reopening of the Liceu.¹⁷⁶ Espert's production was sumptuously theatrical, seemingly a love letter from one grande dame of the theatre to another. The choice of Espert's *Turandot* to re-open the theatre was clearly significant, it marked a suture that linked the disaster of 1994 to the present, indicating that life at the Liceu was back, and Espert's production was a reference to the great amount of musical, theatrical and operatic talent available locally. From the re-opening onwards, Matabosch has made clear and repeated efforts to include local producers, performers and Catalan works into the Liceu, both in the main programme and in the Foyer and Petit Liceu programmes. The 2009 performance of *Turandot* was chosen as a fitting symbol of the ten years that had elapsed since the reopening of the theatre and as such, has acquired something of a historical memory in the Liceu, marking in a synchronic way the before and after of the Liceu. Purposely chosen to unite the pre- and post-fire Liceus, the production has acted as a conduit between precisely the 'Liceu de tota la vida' ('The Liceu as it has always been' i.e. the traditions and historical memory of the Liceu) and the 'Liceu de tots', while providing a

¹⁷⁶ The reconstruction's architect, Ignasi Solà-Morales is quoted as having cited an initial cost of 4bn pesetas (the equivalent of around €24m in 1994, around €40m in 2012), but on the 7th of November 1994, the public bodies involved signed off a budget of 9.6bn pesetas (around €58m in 1994, some €96m in 2012). Figures derived from the Consumer Price Index chart provided by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística at www.ine.es. 'El foc destrueix el Liceu', *Anuaris.CAT* <http://www.anuaris.cat/article/bel_foc_destrueix_el_liceub_any_1994_cultura_espectacles_i_mitjans_de_comunicacio/641> [accessed 5 August 2013]

symbolic starting point between. This said, *Turandot's* symbolism is not limited to the temporal importance it has for the Liceu. At the helm of the production was Nuria Espert, the grande dame of not only Catalan but also Spanish theatre, widely-respected as both director and actress.¹⁷⁷ Espert's *Turandot* was aesthetically a traditional, if unarguably sumptuous production, with quality voices in the shape of Maria Guleghina as Turandot and Marco Berti as Calaf and high production values, with sets designed by Ezio Frigerio, a longtime collaborator of Giorgio Strehler. This *Turandot* was one of the operas from the 'Liceu de tota la vida' era, a kind of swansong for an era where the Liceu's reputation was that of a 'teatre de veus', rather than the hungrily internationalist theatre it became under Joan Matabosch's artistic direction (from 1996 onwards). In order to remedy the break in music and story between Puccini's score and Alfano's lavishly romantic completion, Espert had Turandot commit suicide, an action more suited to the sections completed by Puccini before his death, but in a time frame that takes place in Alfano's more idealistic final act. This adaptation to suit contemporary logic could be interpreted as an initial sign of the changes at the Liceu; a determined decision to follow a more contemporary approach to culture; a reflection of Barcelona's cultural modernisation throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s.

Barcelona, as a city, prides itself on its forward thinking and acceptance of new, liberal developments in artistic and theatrical trends: not for nothing do the Cs in MACBA and CCCB stand for 'Contemporary'. The city embraces modernity of form and content: the examples of modern architecture in Barcelona abound – from the Sagrada Família to MACBA and the CCCB. Joan Ramon Resina's book *Barcelona's Vocation of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008) explores the idea of the city's

¹⁷⁷ For more on Nuria Espert's work, see Maria Delgado's *'Other' Spanish Theatres: Erasure and Inscription on the Twentieth-Century Spanish Stage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 132-182.

attachment to novelty and the vanguard in some depth. In terms of modernity in theatre, the Grec theatre festival under Ricardo Szwarczer (2006-11) placed emphasis on novel forms of staging and innovative re-tellings of traditional stories to acclaim,¹⁷⁸ and the Teatre Lliure has a long pedigree of forward-thinking, provocative theatre, especially under the direction of Àlex Rigola (2003-11). This theatre's reputation for theatrical modernity and innovation has even bled into the Liceu's own programming with a Rigola production of *The Flying Dutchman* featuring at the opera house in 2007. This desire for modernity is key to understanding the rationale that has propelled Joan Matabosch's artistic programme to shift the Liceu away from the more traditional courses taken by other Spanish opera houses (i.e. Madrid's Real and Valencia's Palau de les Arts). Years of careful programming from the time of Albin Hänseroth as the Liceu's artistic director (1992-1996) and latterly under Joan Matabosch, has led Barcelona to be considered to have a more wide-ranging, 'European' approach to opera that is not afraid to include new operas and trends into the repertoire.¹⁷⁹ An essential part of this programme has been the audience's willingness to accept novel forms and less-than-conventional readings of familiar operas. Recalling the popular nature of the upper floors of the Liceu, the 'Liceu de tots' programme seeks to attract a different kind of audience than the one traditionally associated with the theatre: less of Josep Pla's 'ocean of bourgeoisie, dripping with jewels' (see p. 34), and more casual trips to the Liceu, as one might visit any of the other theatres in Barcelona. The promotion of subscriptions in

¹⁷⁸ Szwarczer was replaced by Tarragona native Ramón Simó in July 2011 with no competition for the director's job due to a lack of time, according to Barcelona City Council's minister for Culture, Jaume Ciurana. D. Morán, 'Ramon Simó, nuevo director del Grec', *ABC*, 28 July 2011 <<http://www.abc.es/20110728/local-cataluna/abci-ramon-simo-nuevo-director-201107280847.html>> [accessed 5 August 2013].

¹⁷⁹ The definition of the use of 'European' with regards to Barcelona and Catalonia is somewhat vague – it means not-Spanish and more liberal, but does not seem to refer to any particularly Germanic, Nordic or other Mediterranean traits. See John London, 'Contemporary Catalan Drama in English: Some Aspirations and Limitations', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 17 (2007), 453-462 for more on the subject.

the wake of the fire arguably 'normalised' visits to the Liceu in a similar way that subscriptions to Barcelona Football Club do, and in recent times Matabosch himself has compared *culés*' (FC Barcelona supporters) willingness to pay for increasingly expensive season tickets but yet bemoaned the consideration that opera subscriptions were 'expensive'.¹⁸⁰

Borrowing theatre critic Agustí Fancelli's expression 'The theatre of yesterday and forever' from an article commemorating ten years of the El Liceu de tots programme that was bookended by performances of *Turandot*, it is worth asking whether this programme has really achieved what it set out to achieve.¹⁸¹ In his article Fancelli underlines that the Liceu needs to balance traditional, well-executed operas 'de tota la vida', which he clearly places in a pre-fire framework with the modern, brash works of Bieito's *Un ballo in maschera* (2001) and Peter Konwitschny's *Lohengrin* (2006). The importance of the latter lie in the theatre's new remit to be a 'public cultural centre' that provides new forms of the art to bring it to a wider audience beyond the people of the 'de tota la vida' generation.

This greater inclusion of modern and twentieth-century operas in hindsight can be interpreted as a way to bring to the Liceu closer to the current of cultural modernisation prevalent in Barcelona in the 1990s;¹⁸² with a renovated theatre, so too a renovated programme. The modernisation of the theatre's structure, incorporating various governmental organs such as the Generalitat de Catalunya, Barcelona City

¹⁸⁰ Ànima, 112, 15 October 2012 <<http://www.tv3.cat/3alacarta/#/videos/4289131>> [accessed 17 January 2013]

¹⁸¹ Agustí Fancelli, 'El teatro de ayer y de siempre', *La Vanguardia*, 23 July 2009 <http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2009/07/23/actualidad/1248300002_850215.html> [accessed 16 May 2012]

¹⁸² From the re-opening of in 1999, the Liceu produced 20th-century operas for 31% of their productions, with a high of six out of thirteen production in 2006 being from the last century. Recent years have seen a much smaller share of 20th- century operas, with only a 2 out of 8 in the 2013 season.

Council and Provincial Government as well as the Ministry of Culture in Madrid, has in theory increased the public involvement (or at least entailed greater accountability to the public) in the theatre.¹⁸³ This public involvement, together with a new programme under the aegis of 'el Liceu de tots' which seeks out contemporary, radical directors to turn their hand to traditional operas has transformed a private, albeit idiosyncratically-run institution that represented the bourgeois culture of 19th- and 20th-century Barcelona into a modern cultural centre, adapted to fit the late 20th-century Catalan model of cultural management, which conceived of culture as a panacea and unifying element in the city. The success of this model is questionable, given the proximity of institution and government (a worrying hangover from Francoist times, and itself inherited from an imported French model) and a feature common to all large cultural institutions in Spain. The lack of an independent buffer organisation makes these institutions particularly liable to changes in funding from the respective levels of government (national, regional and city) and creates an unstable environment both in terms of the cultural reputation of the institution and in its programming, as will be delineated in later on in the chapter. Indeed, the Liceu has been seriously affected by funding cuts half way through seasons when the programming for each season is usually completed several years in advance using projected funding figures.

CULTURE FUNDING, POLITICS AND THE LICEU

¹⁸³ Of the four institutions, the Spanish Ministry of Culture and Generalitat de Catalunya are the major funders of the Liceu, providing between them over 80% of the public funding in the 2012-13 and 2013-14 season. The remainder is provided by the Ajuntament and Diputació de Barcelona (the city council and provincial government respectively) in roughly 2:1 proportions. EFE, 'Liceo contará con un presupuesto de 39,2 millones para la temporada 2013-14', *ABC* <<http://www.abc.es/agencias/noticia.asp?noticia=1365895>> [accessed 29 July 2013]

An important factor in understanding cultural funding that is not necessarily obvious from an Anglo-American perspective is the difference in how various institutions are financed. In Spain culture is very closely linked to the government, both in terms of how money is given out and how the institutions are run. This is a highly-centralised model imported from France that is also used in Italy, whereby the vast majority of cultural institutions are publically owned and subsequently managed much as any other government department.¹⁸⁴ The closely-linked nature of this model can be put down to a certain extent to the relatively recent nature of Spain's existence as a democratic country. Orozco notes: 'In a relatively young democratic system that that of the Spanish State, political intervention cannot be ignored, since public posts in culture change when one particular political party's governance comes to an end.'¹⁸⁵ As such, with the recent funding cuts, the culture budget in Spain is compared directly to other departments such as health or education. The budgets of the larger theatres and their high levels of subsidies are frequently dependent on potentially volatile politics that depend directly or indirectly on the economy, as well as being directly affected by personal and/or political whims.¹⁸⁶ This influence is compounded by the fact that executive directors of large cultural institutions are frequently chosen from inside party ranks.

¹⁸⁴ A close comparison of Spanish and French cultural policies is made in Emmanuel Négrier's comparative study 'Las políticas culturales en Francia y España: Una aproximación nacional y local comparada', *Working Papers, Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials* (226, 2003) http://ddd.uab.cat/pub/worpaper/2003/hdl_2072_1239/ICPS226.pdf [accessed 4 August 2012]

¹⁸⁵ 'En un sistema relativamente joven como es el Estado Español la intervención pública no puede descartarse, ya que los puestos públicos de cultura cambian de nombre cuando el gobierno de un determinado partido político llega a su fin'. Lourdes Orozco, *Teatro y Política: Barcelona (1980-2000)* (Madrid: Publicaciones de la Asociación de Directores de Escena de España, 2007), p. 16.

¹⁸⁶ At the beginning of the economic recession, over half of the Liceu's budget was provided by the varying levels of public administrations: 'El Patronato del Liceu aprueba un presupuesto de 58,5 millones, un 2% más', *La Vanguardia*, 20 March 2009 <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/cultura/20090320/53664419631/el-patronato-del-liceu-aprueba-un-presupuesto-de-58-5-millones-un-2-mas.html>> [accessed 4 August 2013]

For comparison, the UK enjoys the buffer zone of the Arts Council, a non-departmental public body that came about in 1940 under the name of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, which later changed its name to the Arts Council of Great Britain (nowadays Arts Council of England), which itself came under the aegis of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. This 'at arm's length' body is an important contrast to the direct involvement of the government in culture, and in theory at least, mitigates the insecurity of a constantly-changing political spectrum as well as impeding direct government intervention in cultural issues. Similar organs exist throughout Europe, such as the Akademie der Künste in Germany, Norsk Kulturråd in Norway, Sweden's Kulturrådet and the Taiteen keskustoimikunta, the Arts Council of Finland. The provenance of these government-affiliated organisations seems to illustrate that this is a northern European trend rather than a southern European one.

Spain lacks this kind of organisation at a national level, but it is worth mentioning that the Socialist government of Catalonia set up the Consell Nacional de la Cultura i de les Arts (CoNCA, National Council for Culture and the Arts) in 2008 as a kind of Catalan Arts Council that would help to define the government's line in matters such as the management and adjudication of arts funding and arts programming. CoNCA was a body that looked to the tradition of arts management as in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries. However, even in the commission of a cultural regulatory body such as CoNCA, a change in politics affected the entire programme. Originally drawn up under Pasqual Maragall's Socialist government in 2005, CoNCA was voted into law in 2008 (with the abstention of right-wing parties *Convergència i Unió*, *Partit Popular de Catalunya* and *Ciutadans*), but a mere three years after CoNCA was set up in 2008, the body was closed down shortly after *Convergència i Unió* came to power in Catalonia in November 2010. Furthermore, the government's *Conseller de Cultura* (Culture

Minister) Ferran Mascarell dismissed the law that had created the quango, severely cutting back CoNCA's powers, citing excessive costs: it was claimed that for every €1000 given in subsidies, €600 was spent on CoNCA's organisational structure.¹⁸⁷ This consequently, resulted in ten of the eleven members of the Consell resigning.¹⁸⁸ As such, CoNCA went from being an executive body to a consultative body, replaced by a new Institut Català de la Creació i de les Empreses Culturals (ICCEC) in 2011, which was itself replaced by the ICIC (Institut Català de les Empreses Culturals) in 2012. Despite the best intentions of CoNCA's founder, Josep Maria Bricall, professor of Economic Policy at the University of Barcelona, the board was never fully realised as an organ to mediate between the Generalitat and the artistic world. This can be seen in the paltry sums it handed out. During 2011, it distributed just over €8.1m between 479 cultural projects,¹⁸⁹ a 2.7% of the total Catalan culture budget for the same year (just over €300 million).¹⁹⁰ In effect, the CoNCA project was a well-conceived, but ill-implemented concept that perpetuated the image of cronyism prevalent in the wider Spanish context. The right-wing parties' abstention from the vote that brought CoNCA into law was ostensibly about the lack of musical representation on the board, but it seems more likely that it was actually due to the unarticulated fact that there were few right-wing sympathisers on the board, which was itself a left-wing initiative.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ ACN Barcelona, 'Mascarell carrega contra el CoNCA al parlament', *Ara*, 23 November 2011 <http://www.ara.cat/cultura/Ferran_Mascarell-CoNCA_0_596340510.html> [accessed 17 May 2012]

¹⁸⁸ ARA Barcelona, 'Dimiteixen deu dels onze membres del CoNCA: "Ha guanyat la dreta reaccionària"', *Ara*, 7 November 2011 <http://www.ara.cat/cultura/CoNCA-dimissio-Mascarell_0_586741418.html> [accessed 4 August 2013]. The body's written objection can be seen in Catalan here: <<http://www.conca.cat/ca/noticies/noticia/ComunicatEndefensadelCoNCA>> [accessed 4 August 2013]

¹⁸⁹ ARA Barcelona, 'El CoNCA adjudica més de 8 milions d'euros a 479 projectes durant el 2011', *Ara*, 20 December 2011 <http://www.ara.cat/cultura/CoNCA-adjudica-milions-deuros-projectes_0_612538876.html> [accessed 17 May 2012]

¹⁹⁰ Europa Press, 'Cultura recorta un 0'3% su presupuesto y se queda en 301'5 millones de euros', Europa Press, 26 January 2012 <<http://www.europapress.es/catalunya/noticia-cultura-recorta-03-presupuesto-queda-3015-millones-euros-20120126190716.html>> [accessed 17 May 2012]

¹⁹¹ This to a certain extent was borne out by the distribution of financing in 2011: Dance was awarded 37% of the total, visual arts 27%, theatre 12%, music 11%, circus 10% and 'contemporary

In addition, the long gestation of CoNCA, from 2005 to 2008, and its signing into law only to be dismantled a few years later by Ferran Mascarell (who was a member of the Socialist party until the turn of the decade; he is now independent and became part of CiU's government as an independent minister in 2010) is arguably something of an indication of how cultural management works in Catalonia. It is likely that the CoNCA was an initiative by the Socialist government to have a greater influence in the cultural sphere by reducing the power of other private quangos such as the Cercle de Cultura (of which, naturally, Mascarell was a founder and to which he still holds membership).¹⁹² Once the Socialists were ousted by *Convergència i Unió* in the 2010 Catalan elections, it seems that CoNCA's death warrant was signed; rather than abolishing the body outright, Ferran Mascarell cut back its influence to the point where CoNCA became powerless.

Beyond institutional structures, a brief discussion of how Catalan cultural policy is constructed is relevant Catalonia's status as a small nation within a greater state, with a long-standing Europeanist tradition and a developed cultural sector was perhaps an ideal place for what Kathryn Crameri terms 'elitist arts'.¹⁹³ Since Catalonia was accorded its own Statute of Autonomy in 1979, a part of which was the ability to control its own cultural and educational matters given its past as an 'historic nationality' within Spain (like the Basque Country, Galicia and later Andalucía), there have been criticisms of CiU's interpretation of what Catalan culture should be. Josep-Anton Fernàndez qualifies:

thought' 2%. Source: ARA Barcelona, 'El CoNCA adjudica més de 8 milions d'euros a 479 projectes durant el 2011', *Ara*, 20 December 2011 <http://www.ara.cat/cultura/CoNCA-adjudica-milions-deuros-projectes_0_612538876.html> [accessed 17 May 2012]

¹⁹² Sergi Marimon, 'El Cercle de Cultura demana una reforma profunda del sector cultural', *Ara*, 10 March 2011 <http://www.ara.cat/cultura/Cercle_de_Cultura-Mascarell-pressupostos-retallada_0_441556035.html> [accessed 17 May 2012]

¹⁹³ Kathryn Crameri, *Catalonia: National Identity and Cultural Policy 1980-2000* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), p. 101.

Catalanism has created a cultural model devoid of content, where the working mechanism is more important than the function of the elements that make up the model.¹⁹⁴

Thus Fernández suggests that the bureaucratic structure created by *Convergència i Unió* is the focus of Catalan cultural policy. This is as opposed to the creation of a recognisably Catalan culture that represents the increasingly heterogeneous and multilingual population of Catalonia. CiU's policy focused more on the prestige their cultural model could bring them on a governmental level, rather than on the benefits it would bring on a societal level,¹⁹⁵ or the efficacy of the cultural production model they fostered insofar as whether the creation of culture that was taking place represented modern Catalonia. CiU's cultural policy could therefore be considered rather self-aggrandising, composed of imposing, expensive, and highly-visible gestures that neither addressed nor reflected the needs or wants of the average Barcelona citizen. In an interview with *Teatral.net*, Andreu Morte, director of the Mercat de les Flors on two occasions (1987-1991 and 2002-2005), notes: 'The Generalitat is a shopkeeper who sells, but doesn't buy. This is the problem with a meagre, dramatic cultural policy',¹⁹⁶ this time underlining the exclusive nature of CiU's cultural policy. Despite being almost entirely Barcelona-based in their focus, CiU's approach to culture ignores the city's largely bilingual, heterogeneous population in favour of the construction of a bourgeois Catalan (and usually Catalan-language) culture, a reflection of the party's own make-up and voter base. Linguistic issues apart, CiU's cultural policies make little room for the

¹⁹⁴ 'El catalanisme ha creat un model cultural buit de contingut, on el que importa és més la mecànica de funcionament que no pas la funció dels elements que componen aquest model'. Cited in Orozco, *Teatro y Política*, p. 117.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ 'La Generalitat és el botiguer que ven però no compra res. Aquest és el problema d'una política cultural minsca i dramàtica'. "El retorn d'un revolucionari" Entrevista a Andreu Morte, *Teatral.net*, <<http://www.teatral.net/asp/entrevistes/index.asp>> [accessed 1 August 2012]

social inclusion that should accompany large-scale immigration, with an excessive concentration on middle-class, Catalan-speaking culture that arguably alienates a large section of Catalonia's population. With the autonomy granted by the Constitution, Catalonia was in a position to engineer its own cultural policy practically from scratch (within the confines of the state's own policies), with the option of borrowing ideas from other countries and then subsequently applying its own experience and technique as deemed necessary. However, CiU's insistence on the creation of a Catalan culture that is inextricably linked to the positive discrimination of the Catalan language in Catalonia has left little room for debate or indeed opposition. As might be expected, the concept of Catalan culture reflected the elite that created the framework for cultural management as a whole. Despite the increasingly diverse nature of Catalonia (as a result of immigration from other parts of Spain and latterly, Eastern Europe, North and Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia),¹⁹⁷ CiU's model allows for little flexibility in what can be considered Catalan, and arguably reflects their own electorate, which is a metropolitan upper-middle-class Barcelona elite. Such a selective approach to Catalan culture arguably nullifies the contribution of Castilian-language cultural production to the city and Catalonia as a whole. Given Barcelona's hegemony on almost every level within Catalonia, from administration, transport, funding and culture, it comes as little surprise that governmental cultural policy is almost entirely concentrated on the city. The three provincial capitals of Girona, Tarragona and Lleida play an obvious second fiddle to Barcelona, and are furnished with Barcelona-lite culture such as the CaixaForum and

¹⁹⁷ According to Idescat in 2012, of a total population of 7,571,000 in Catalonia, 6,384,000 were Spanish. A combined (EU and non-EU) European total of 367,000, closely followed by Africans, making up 322,000, and 282,000 South Americans. Source: Idescat. <<http://www.idescat.cat/pub/?id=aec&n=258>> [accessed 4 August 2013]. In Barcelona in 2012, 17.49% of the population was of foreign origin. Source: Idescat <<http://www.idescat.cat/poblacioestrangera/?b=6>> [accessed 9 August 2013]

the Museu Nacional d'Arqueologia de Tarragona (Tarragona National Archaeology Museum). A notable exception to this is the Temporada Alta theatre festival in Girona, which has been important in premiering new work and fostering co-productions. These cultural events tend to be Barcelona exports to the provinces, and in the case of Temporada Alta, functions as a winter theatre festival for *barcelonins*. To a large extent, this heavy focus on the regional capital can be understood by Barcelona's overwhelming concentration of resources and people. The Barcelona Metropolitan Area, comprising 36 towns and cities considered to be integrated into Barcelona itself, has a population of 3,226,944 out of a total population in Catalonia of 7,539,618 in 2011,¹⁹⁸ translating to 42.8% of Catalonia's total population.¹⁹⁹ For reference, the city of Barcelona has a population of 1,615,448, or 21.4% of the total for Catalonia. Given these figures, the overwhelmingly urban nature of CiU's policies becomes clear in that they promote a massive concentration of financial and cultural resources in the capital and investment in linking provincial cities to Barcelona.

However, to equate the conservatism of CiU's cultural policies with the Liceu's own programming would be a mistake. In fact, to a certain extent the inward-looking cultural policy pursued by CiU contrasts with the visibly internationalist bent of the Liceu.

The opera house is known for looking beyond the border to bring 'the best' of international opera to Barcelona. This tradition could be dated to the previously mentioned successful edition of the Wagner Bayreuth Festival at the Liceu in 1955 (a

¹⁹⁸ Àrea Metropolitana de Barcelona, Estudi Població i Creixement, <http://www.amb.cat/c/document_library/get_file?p_l_id=5734&folderId=858132&name=DLFE-11108.pdf> [accessed 1 August 2012]

¹⁹⁹ Idescat, Padró Municipal d'Habitants, <<http://www.idescat.cat/territ/BasicTerr?TC=8&V3=863&V4=435&ALLINFO=TRUE&PARENT=1&V0=3&V1=0&CTX=B&VN=3&VOK=Confirmar>> [accessed 1 August 2012]

coup for the theatre that was repeated in the 2012-13 season for the bicentenary of Wagner's birth), but nowadays this practically means that a large percentage of the operas staged at the Liceu are co-productions with other European houses. In effect, economic necessity dictates that co-productions with other houses are more and more the norm, as they mean that two or more opera houses can share the creation costs for one production. Sharing expertise and resources is one way for opera houses to reduce costs, especially at a time of cuts in public subsidy. The problem of cutbacks in culture funding is now no longer a novelty; the announcing of seemingly ever-greater reduction in funding, with its inevitable consequences for the cultural industries and the quangos that govern them has become an inexorable part of European cultural life. To enumerate some examples, in 2011 in England, the Arts Council has seen its funding reduced by 6.9%²⁰⁰, the Berlusconi government in Italy attempted to cut €280m from its culture budget in 2010,²⁰¹ Dutch culture saw its budget reduced by €200m to €700m in 2011,²⁰² and Dublin's arts 2010-11 funding was cut by €9m.²⁰³ The situation in Spain is similar, where the Ministerio de Cultura's funding has been cut by just under 8% from 2010 to 2011.²⁰⁴

Interestingly, the Liceu's rival, the Teatro Real in Madrid has turned to selling on their own productions to other opera houses and running live streamings of

²⁰⁰ M. Brown, 'Arts funding cuts: The story so far', *The Guardian*, 12 January 2011 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/culture-cuts-blog/2011/jan/12/arts-funding-cuts-libraries>> [accessed 1 May 2012].

²⁰¹ Anon., 'Italian cultural attractions go on strike over cuts', *BBC News*, 12 November 2010 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11741506>> [accessed 1 May 2012]

²⁰² Anon., 'Minister details Dutch culture cuts', *Radio Netherlands Worldwide*, 10 June 2011 <<http://www.rnw.nl/africa/bulletin/minister-details-dutch-culture-cuts>> [accessed 1 May 2012]

²⁰³ Author?, Hard times: how the recession is affecting arts funding around the globe, *Guardian*, 19 February 2010 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2010/feb/19/arts-funding-global-recession>> [Accessed 1 May 2012]

²⁰⁴ Specifically, from €1,199m to €1,103m, taken p. 238 of the 2011 Economic and Financial Report, available at <<http://www.sggp.pap.meh.es/sitios/sggp/es-ES/Presupuestos/InformeEconomicoFinanciero/Documents/Informe%20economico%20financiero%202011%20v1-Reducido.pdf>> [Accessed 1 May 2012]

productions to participating cinema chains as a way of raising income for the theatre, helping the theatre announce their rather surprising profit for 2013.²⁰⁵ In the press conference that accompanied the financial discussions the president of the Real's executive committee, Gregorio Marañón underlined the theatre's status as a 'national opera, a reference in Spain, even if there are other opera houses'.²⁰⁶ Despite this good financial news, the Real has, however, not been untouched by the economic crisis: in 2012 the Spanish Ministry of Culture reduced their own contribution by 30%,²⁰⁷ exacerbating an ongoing complicated situation at the Real: the then artistic director Gérard Mortier threatened to break his contract and leave the Madrid theatre if there were further funding cuts.²⁰⁸ In the context of the scrutiny that cultural institutions are now subject to in the light of the recession, the issue of the percentages of funding received by the Real in comparison to the Liceu have proved a constant source of indignation for the Liceu and the Catalan press in general, which perceives that the Real is given more funding than the Liceu despite more conservative programming. Orozco notes: 'Madrid is the city of the traditional, private theatres, with a relatively rich endowment and a tendency towards a certain conventionality and conservatism'.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁵ The Real's total budget for 2013-14 according to *El País* is €42.5m, of which €10m comes from sponsors, and a projected €22.5m in public subsidy. Daniel Verdú, 'Gregorio Marañón: "Mortier cumplirá su contrato hasta 2016"', *El País*, 6 February 2013 <http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2013/02/06/actualidad/1360158997_560408.html> [Accessed 5 August 2013].

²⁰⁶ 'Ópera nacional, de referencia en España, aunque pueda haber otras óperas'. Daniel Verdú, 'Gregorio Marañón: "Mortier cumplirá su contrato hasta 2016"', *El País*, 6 February 2013 <http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2013/02/06/actualidad/1360158997_560408.html> [accessed 5 August 2013]

²⁰⁷ Daniel Verdú, 'El Real se encomienda a la financiación privada para salvar su proyecto', *El País*, 4 October 2012 <http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2012/10/04/actualidad/1349350399_378707.html> [accessed 5 August 2013]

²⁰⁸ Daniel Verdú, 'Mortier advierte que no seguirá en el Real si hay más recortes', *El País*, 16 October 2012 <http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2012/10/16/actualidad/1350397530_850961.html> [accessed 9 August 2013]

²⁰⁹ 'Madrid es la ciudad de los teatros privados tradicionales, con una dotación bastante rica y tendencia hacia un cierto convencionalismo e inmovilismo', Lourdes Orozco, *Teatro en Barcelona: 1980-2000* (Madrid, Asociación de los Directores de Escena, 2007), p. 16.

Barcelona on the other hand is portrayed as ‘the more experimental and critical theatre city, where the spirit of Independent Theatre has been more strongly maintained’.²¹⁰

For the 2012-13 season, the Real had a budget of €46,396,000 (in comparison the Gran Teatre del Liceu received €45.6m²¹¹), which included a 10% reduction from the previous season. At the same time, sponsorship income has risen to €7.3m.²¹² The Real has also claimed to have reduced its dependence on government financing – in 2004 according to *El País*, 58% of the theatre’s budget was publically-financed. In the 2013-14 season, the Real claims to have reduced their public finances (from the Ministry of Culture, and the Community and Madrid City Council) to 30.3% of the €42.4m budget for that year. The same report claims that the Real’s relatively robust health in this time of financial difficulty is down to renting out their own productions to other theatres, renting out the theatre’s spaces (as the Liceu does), and a reduction in maintenance, running, staffing and production costs, which have offset the fall in public income and the rise in VAT.

Nevertheless, in the 2012-13 season, the Real, just like the Liceu, tried to play on a thematic strength: the Liceu programmed the return of the Bayreuth Festival to the Liceu at the beginning of the season, and the Real programmed four Mozart operas for the season, building on the theatre’s frequent productions of the composer’s operas. Gerard Mortier, the artistic director of the Real between (2010-2014) is no stranger to newspaper columns, proved an outspoken critic of the funding cuts applied across the board, and especially in regards to the ever-decreasing budget at the Real, which has

²¹⁰ [‘Barcelona es] la ciudad teatral más crítica y experimental, en la que el espíritu del Teatro Independiente se ha mantenido con más fuerza’, *ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

²¹¹ Calculated from various sources including *La Vanguardia*, *El País* and *ABC* websites

²¹² Daniel Verdú, ‘El Teatro Real reduce presupuesto y apuesta por el repertorio’, *El País*, 13 December 2011 <http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2011/12/13/actualidad/1323730802_850215.html> [accessed 21 January 2013].

had its own difficulties with the staff – who are in the midst of negotiating a rebate on their wages as public workers, since their 5% wage cut was not applied at the right time.²¹³

The enforced austerity of the ever-decreasing budgets has forced Mortier to change productions due to the cost of staging rights and he has claimed that the wardrobe department has had to resort to second-hand shops for costumes.²¹⁴ In press releases circulated in the 2012-2013 season, the Real has underlined that their strategy for surviving the recession is to increase the participation of civic society through auxiliary societies similar to the Actuem pel Liceu platform and to actively seek corporate sponsorship for the theatre.²¹⁵ While the Liceu does have corporate sponsorship, the Real is likely aided by its condition in the capital. Nevertheless, the Liceu clearly has (in some segments at least) civil society on its side due to the long tradition of public participation and ownership (from the ‘joint-stock’ set up to the Actuem pel Liceu platform), something that the Real may envy in their search for avenues of funding.

What is evident in the cases of both the Gran Teatre del Liceu and the Teatro Real is the high level of public money invested in both institutions means that their artistic and executive direction (whether in the form of the Joan Francesc Marco at the Liceu (1997-2013), or Gregorio Marañón, head of the executive committee at the Real since 2007) is closely followed in the press given the sums of public money that is handed out to the

²¹³ Susana Gaviña, ‘Ajuste de cuentas en el Teatro Real’, *ABC*, 20 September 2012 <<http://www.abc.es/20120920/cultura-musica/abci-mortier-dice-teatro-real-201209201626.html>> [accessed 28 August 2013]

²¹⁴ Susana Gaviña, ‘Mortier: “El Teatro Real es uno de las óperas más pobres de Europa”’, *ABC*, 20 September 2012 <<http://www.abc.es/20120920/cultura-musica/abci-mortier-dice-teatro-real-201209201626.html>> [Accessed 21 January 2013].

²¹⁵ ‘El patronato del Teatro Real aprueba los presupuestos del año 2013’, Teatro Real website, <<http://www.teatro-real.com/es/noticias/el-patronato-del-teatro-real-aprueba-los-presupuest>> [Accessed 30 January 2013].

theatres. The context of shrinking culture department budgets and reduced box office takings means that the public purse for culture is publically scrutinised in the news. In 2012, the Real noted a 13% reduction in the number of subscribers; this is put down to the recession and the theatre's policy of selling tickets on the day at a very reduced rate, and an agreement with the university that means that students can go for free, helping to contribute to the theatre's impressive 95% occupation figure.²¹⁶ Nevertheless, the blame for the fall in box office income is also placed squarely at artistic director Gérard Mortier's programming,²¹⁷ a claim that the Liceu's counterpart, Joan Matabosch, has successfully avoided, perhaps due to the sense, noted by Orozco, that Madrid is more conservative in taste than the more adventurous Liceu-goers.

THE LICEU'S MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

The absence of the Liceu in discussions about cultural policy is a common phenomenon. This could partially be explained by its hybrid public-private nature, which for the purposes of cultural management sits uncomfortably between the more commercial Barcelona theatre enterprises, which tend to produce popular musicals, comedies of errors, and Castilian-language stagings (for example, the productions at Teatro Apolo, Teatro Victòria, Teatro Tívoli and Teatro Coliseum), and the public-funded and -managed, ostensibly high(er)-brow Catalan-language productions of the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya and the Teatre Lliure/Ciutat del Teatre complex. The omission of the Liceu from the 2004 *Del Xino al Raval: Cultura i transformació a la Barcelona central* CCCB study, as mentioned in the previous chapter (see p. 114) is representative of this

²¹⁶ Susana Gaviña, 'Ajuste de cuentas en el Teatro Real', *ABC*, 20 September 2012 <<http://www.abc.es/20120920/cultura-musica/abci-mortier-dice-teatro-real-201209201626.html>> [accessed 28 August 2013]

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

lack of surety about where the Liceu fits in terms of the institutions' cultural management and remit.²¹⁸

Somewhat at odds with the theatre's technological modernity, the Liceu remains a product of the civil society of the mid-19th century, and the governing structure of the theatre still bears some idiosyncrasies left over from its period as a private entity. Following the so-called democratisation of the theatre in the 1980s after a period of decline and increasing alienation from the citizens of Barcelona, a consortium was created in 1981 to govern the Liceu (the Consorci del Liceu) with representatives from government organs both local and national; from the Diputació (5%) and Ajuntament de Barcelona (10%), the Generalitat de Catalunya (40%) and the Ministerio de Cultura (45%).²¹⁹ This move in theory made the Liceu more accountable to the public, and opened the theatre up to greater public subsidies. In addition to the interests implicated by the involvement of these governing institutions, the Liceu retained its system of patronage from large and small sponsors.²²⁰ In 1999, after the fire, the Consorci sought to increase the number of subscriptions, introducing more flexible models to attract a larger, more demographically diverse public than they had previously counted on. The complexity of interests is obvious: on a government level, the Ajuntament de Barcelona (City Council) and Generalitat de Catalunya (Regional Government) were traditionally politically opposed until the 2011 mayoral elections, when *Convergència i Unió* candidate Xavier Trias ousted the *Partit Socialista de Catalunya* mayor Jordi Hereu. In

²¹⁸ Joan Subirats and Joaquim Rius, *Del Xino al Raval: Cultura i transformació a la Barcelona central* (Barcelona: Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, 2004) <http://www.cccb.org/rcs_gene/raval.pdf> [accessed 24 May 2011]

²¹⁹ Lourdes Morgades, 'El Liceo se retracta y retira el ERE para evitar una huelga de 18 días', *El País*, 23 February 2012 <http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2012/02/23/actualidad/1329953718_998627.html> [accessed 15 March 2012]

²²⁰ For example, from local businesses on La Rambla to corporate sponsors such as Spanish banks, and car company SEAT.

addition, the contributions of the Ministry of Culture in Madrid have been by turns generous and frugal.²²¹ Taking into account the interests of the sponsors and the historically vocal contribution of the subscription bearers, the structure of the Liceu is a miasma of conflicting voices, crowned by an executive director that is usually chosen externally according to who is in power in Catalonia at the time. Both Rosa Cullerell and Joan Francesc Marco (the previous and current [at the time of writing in February 2013] Executive Directors respectively) are members of the Partit Socialista de Catalunya.²²² The complexity of the Liceu's management is a hangover from its 'joint-stock' company days, influenced by quango-esque ex-owners committees, as well as a body made up of subscribers in addition to representatives from governmental agencies. Since 1981 the Liceu has been run by an executive commission that approves both the budgets and artistic programming. At the time of writing [February 2013], it is currently composed of two members of the following organisations, the Generalitat, the Ministry of Culture, the Ajuntament de Barcelona, the Consejo de Mecenazgo (Patronage Council), the Sociedad del Gran Teatre del Liceu (the previous owners), two members of the technical team, and one representative from the Diputació de Barcelona (Provincial Government). From this, we can conclude reasonably that the executive commission is comprised of representatives from various interested groups, from the previous owners to the various institutions that provide funding for the Liceu, as well as what feels like a token technical presence. Few, if any of the executive commission have any musical, operatic or cultural management backgrounds, and are chosen, I would argue, as token

²²¹ The Ministry of Culture announced in 2010 that their contribution to their Liceu would be reduced 10% every year for three years, making a total reduction of 30% up to 2013: Lourdes Morgades 'El ministerio reducirá el 30% su ayuda al Liceo en tres años', *El País*, 9 June 2010 <http://elpais.com/diario/2010/06/09/catalunya/1276045644_850215.html> [accessed 1 March 2012]

²²² Anon., 'Acuerdo para que Joan Francesc Marco sea el director del Liceo', *El País*, 18 June 2008, <http://elpais.com/diario/2008/06/18/catalunya/1213751262_850215.html> [accessed 1 March 2012]

representatives. This composition is subject to political changes as various parties are voted into and out of office at different governmental levels. In addition, the presidency of the commission changes frequently according to similarly arbitrary criteria, ensuring a lack of cohesion and continuity.

Joan Matabosch, the current artistic director of the theatre, started his career at the Liceu under the leadership of Albin Hänseroth (artistic director at the Liceu from 1992 to 1996) as a young journalist who helped to coordinate the programmes, until the latter named him co-artistic director in 1993, to the shock of many in the establishment. It is perhaps somewhat telling that he does not even get a mention in Roger Alier's tome *El gran llibre del Liceu*, despite at the time of publication having been acting artistic director for two years.²²³ Matabosch eventually replaced Hänseroth in January 1997 (on a provisional basis, given the board's distrust of his experience). He was finally appointed artistic director in April 1998,²²⁴ and has occupied the role since then. Interestingly, at the time the *El País* writer Agustí Fancelli noted a certain unwillingness on the part of the Liceu to trust in home-grown talent, as if unsure that an institution with such an international vocation could be run by a young man from the neighbouring suburban city of L'Hospitalet de Llobregat. Matabosch's background in journalism and sociology has made itself clear in the theatre's communication policy, which prioritises the provision of previous knowledge of the operas' contents using various methods: presentations in the Foyer before productions, information sheets and the Liceu brochure, which all have an evidently educational purpose to them, in

²²³ Jordi Casanovas, 'Matabosch: L'incendiari discret', *Barcelona Metròpolis Mediterrània*, 62 (2003) <http://www.bcn.cat/publicacions/b_mm/bmm62/bmm62_ultima.htm> [accessed 17 January 2013]

²²⁴ Agustí Fancelli, 'Liceu, provincialismo introvertido', *El País*, 28 February 2000 <http://elpais.com/diario/2000/02/28/catalunya/951703642_850215.html> [accessed 17 January 2013]

common with the practices at many large European opera houses,²²⁵ but Matabosch considers them essential to the success of his project. In the case of the brochure, Matabosch had them redesigned with a strong visual clues to the content and story of the opera, and made them slimline format, like a hand programme, and the information sheets provide a concise summary of the story with occasional historical references that give the contemporary work context. In the task of attracting new audiences to an art form that has a reputation for being oblique and old-fashioned, the artistic director has grasped the importance of communicating what opera is about, and what it is specifically about in Barcelona.

Matabosch's time at the Liceu coincides with serious changes in the Liceu's management and funding structures, partly driven by the opportunity afforded by the fire to modernise not only the installations but also the management. The increasingly cultural and tourist-focussed economy of Barcelona in the twenty years since the 1992 Olympics has seen an increase in cultural funding from the 2000s onwards (in a wider context, under the Socialist government in Spain, the culture budget rose from €875m in 2004 to a high of €1,284bn in 2008, falling to €1,103bn in 2011)²²⁶ from the central government in Madrid, and the Liceu has been party to the bonanza of cultural funding distributed by the Generalitat de Catalunya as shared by the Liceu, Teatre Nacional de Catalunya and the Teatre Lliure as the three principal theatre complexes in Catalonia. Increased public funding has meant a greater accountability to the taxpayer, and thus to a greater interest in whom these institutions are aimed at. The 'Liceu de tots' programme was then designed as a way to increase public investment beyond the

²²⁵ Francesc Cortès, 'Francesc Cortès entrevista Joan Matabosch', *La Revista de Catalunya*, 280 (2012), 111-132 (p. 118).

²²⁶ *Informe económico financiero 2004-2011* <<http://www.sepg.pap.minhap.gob.es/sitios/sgpg/es-ES/Presupuestos/InformeEconomicoFinanciero/Paginas/InformeEconomicoFinanciero.aspx>> [accessed 1 May 2012]

financial dimension in the theatre and to re-integrate the theatre in the post-modern panorama of Barcelona's cultural landscape. In the 'Liceu de tots' era, the theatre has expressly moved away from the more staid, traditional/popular operas to an era of increased experimentation with newer interpretations of opera to suit the adventurous tastes of post-Olympic *barcelonins*; the 'classroom *Lohengrin*' (2006) by Peter Konwitschny, and *Un ballo in maschera* (2001), *Wozzeck* (2007) and *Carmen* (2010), all by Calixto Bieito, La Fura dels Baus's *DQ. Don Quixote en Barcelona* (2000) and *Le Grand Macabre* (2011) are examples of the (post)modernist programming that Matabosch has brought to the Liceu, with some of these stagings premiered at the Liceu before appearing at other European venues (*Un ballo in maschera* went on to appear at the Vlaamse opera and at English National Opera). These works are notable for their provocatively contemporary stagings, taking their cues from the visceral films of Quentin Tarantino and Brian De Palma and in doing so forcefully update the opera's stories into arguably more recognisable contexts for the 21st-century theatre-goer. These works are definitely aimed at a spectator familiar with a canon of noir, gangsterish, explicit films that do not shy away from violence, sexuality and the consequences thereof. While the Liceu has cultivated a reputation for having a less traditional, more tolerant-to-novelty audience, especially since the 1999 re-opening, some of Matabosch's choices of less traditional works exasperated the life-long Liceu-goers. Nevertheless the length of Matabosch's tenure and the proven success of his repertoire (seen, for example in the growth in subscriptions pre-recession)²²⁷ mean that

²²⁷ In a study for the Generalitat's Department of Culture, Marià Marin and Josep Maria Coderch notes that subscriptions to the Liceu grew from a 1994 low of 5,059, to 15,231 in the re-opened season of 1999-2000 to 22,600 in 2002-2003. Marià Marin and Josep Maria Coderch, 'Infraestructures i institucions d'excel·lència a Catalunya', *Nota d'economia*, 76-77 (2003), 51-63, p. 57. <<http://www20.gencat.cat/docs/economia/Documents/Articles/Arxiu/infraestructuresiinstitucionsculturalsd'excel·lenciaacatalunya.pdf>> [accessed 5 August 2013] In his interview with Joan Matabosch, Francesc Cortés notes that in the 2011-12 season there were 17,985 subscriptions,

productions previously considered outrageous (or at the very least non-traditional) are nowadays the norm, and no longer cause the scandal of previous years.

Outside of the commission, there are the inherent difficulties and tensions between the artistic director and executive director (a position that in other countries, for example in Germany, is combined in to the single role of *Intendant*). This is in part due to the fact that their positions seem to be defined according to who is in each post. Since taking on the role of artistic director in 1996, Joan Matabosch has seen three executive directors (Josep Caminal [a member of *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya* – the C in CiU –and ex-director of the Catalan Radio and Television Corporation, at the Liceu from 1993-2005], Rosa Cullell [an ex-BBC and *El País* correspondent, and communications director at La Caixa bank, as well as featuring on the executive board of publishing group Grup 62; at the Liceu 2005-08], and Joan Francesc Marco, a Socialist-affiliated culture commissioner from Hospitalet de Llobregat who had worked at the Teatre Nacional and the Ciutat de Música de Sabadell, 2008-2013]). During Josep Caminal’s tenure, Matabosch consolidated his presence in the theatre, attracting more modern productions to the theatre, and becoming the public face of the theatre, with newspaper articles and public appearances. This trend continued under Rosa Cullell, who was a largely hands-off executive director, leaving Joan Matabosch as artistic director to present the new seasons and to conduct interviews in the press. The relationship between Matabosch and Cullell’s successor, Joan Francesc Marco, has presented key challenges with Marco refashioning the artistic director’s responsibilities in ways that have had serious consequences for the Liceu, in

the reduction of which was put down to the reduction in disposable income, rather than down to a fall in quality. Francesc Cortès, “Francesc Cortès entrevista Joan Matabosch”, *La Revista de Catalunya*, 280 (2012) 111-132, p. 117.

addition to the complex financial issues that the institution has undergone in recent years.

MODERN MONEY: THE LICEU AND THE RECESSION

In February 2012, the Minister of Culture for the Generalitat Ferran Mascarell referred to the Liceu as ‘a kind Frankenstein, which nevertheless has notable dysfunctions’;²²⁸ a soundbyte that arguably reflects the political establishment’s view of Barcelona’s opera house, if not of culture in general. After a long period of generous socialist rule both in Barcelona and centrally, the cultural industries are arguably accustomed to relatively secure funding.²²⁹ Under more stringent rule by the conservative *Convergència i Unió* who came to power in December 2010 in Barcelona and Catalonia, all areas have suffered harsh cutbacks. Mascarell, when presenting the Generalitat’s €301m culture budget for 2011-12, made much of a supposedly fair redistribution of resources.²³⁰ In the case of the big institutions, most of them had suffered a 15% cut in their contributions from the Generalitat; Mascarell explained that these institutions were better placed to take such a cut, and claimed that *Convergència i Unió*’s current cultural policy places a much greater emphasis on nurturing grassroots culture than their socialist predecessors. By way of example, at the end of 2012 *Convergència i Unió* earmarked over €1,000,000 to help renovate four local Barcelona theatres as a way of

²²⁸ V. Gaillard, ‘un Frankenstein simpàtic però amb disfuncions notables’ in ‘Cultura mes “eficient”’, *Avui*, 1 March 2012, p. 36. Original text from the Catalan Parliament speech available here: [Diari de sessions del Parlament de Catalunya](http://www.parlament.cat/activitat/dspcc/09c246.pdf), 29 February 2012 <<http://www.parlament.cat/activitat/dspcc/09c246.pdf>> [accessed 28 August 2013]

²²⁹ Under the Socialists, the culture budget rose from €875m in 2004 to a high of €1.284bn in 2008, falling to €1.103bn in 2011. *Informe económico financiero 2004-2011*

²³⁰ The 2012 budget was a 0.3% reduction on 2011: Anon., ‘Cultura recorta un 0'3% su presupuesto y se queda en 301'5 millones de euros’, *Europa Press*, 26 January 2012 <<http://www.europapress.es/catalunya/noticia-cultura-recorta-03-presupuesto-queda-3015-millones-euros-20120126190716.html>> [accessed 2 March 2012]

promoting urban regeneration locally.²³¹ Nevertheless, it is difficult to see such measures as anything but token and a vague attempt to offset the severe reductions in funding.

Given these numbers, something of a comparative study is useful to gauge the real effect of the cutbacks in the case of the Liceu. Opera houses are rarely cheap to run, and the Liceu is no exception. In this 2011-12 season the Liceu's budget was around €48 million (of which around €25m was public funding), similar to the 2001-02 levels of financing.²³² By comparison, Madrid's Teatro Real received an estimated €48 million,²³³ and the Teatre Lliure, Barcelona's premier theatre of reference, was assigned around €8.5 million.²³⁴ This sum of public funding has remained more or less the same since 2007, with a high of €27 million in 2008, but the 2012-13 season saw this sum drop to around €19 million, due to a €4 million shortfall from the Spanish Ministry of Culture and a €2 million reduction from the Generalitat de Catalunya. According to the Generalitat's Conselleria de Cultura (Culture Council), the Liceu's total income (including paying entrance) has been reduced by just over 10% in the five years between 2007 and 2012.²³⁵ During the same period, the Generalitat's own contribution to the Liceu has been reduced by 37% (for reference, the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya and Teatre Lliure's contributions have been cut by 26% and 15% respectively).²³⁶ These

²³¹ EFE, 'Barcelona subvenciona con 1,1 millones las obras de cuatro ateneos de barrio', *La Vanguardia*, 3 December 2012 <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/local/barcelona/20121203/54356059655/barcelona-obras-cuatro-ateneos-barrio.html>> [accessed 5 August 2013]

²³² Lourdes Morgades, 'El Liceo se retracta y retira el ERE para evitar una huelga de 18 días' *El País*, 23 February 2012 <http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2012/02/23/actualidad/1329953718_998627.html> [accessed 24 February 2012]

²³³ The budget for 2012-13 is around €50m, after a 10% reduction in the Ministry of Culture, and reductions from both the Madrid's city council and regional government: Daniel Verdú, 'El Teatro Real reduce presupuesto y apuesta por el repertorio', *El País*, 13 December 2011 <http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2011/12/13/actualidad/1323730802_850215.html> [accessed 14 March 2012]

²³⁴ Teresa Bruna, 'El Lliure es veu obligat a suspendre tres espectacles', *Teatral.net*, 25 January 2012 <http://www.teatral.net/ca/noticies/fitxa_noticies/12420> [accessed 1 March 2012]

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

figures give some idea of the significance of the funding cuts as a whole in relation to the Liceu's total income and to cultural installations in general. Despite these cutbacks, in terms of sheer numbers, the Liceu enjoys around twice the funding than the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya (whose budget is around €13m) and the Teatre Lliure put together.²³⁷

With regard to the private income streams of the Liceu, 2011 was the first year since the refit that private income was greater than public subsidies, giving the feeling that the Liceu was once again having to bow to market influence to finance itself. One of the ways in which the Liceu has encouraged private income is by organising a large number of 'popular' concerts that have taken place at the venue in recent years – it has now become tradition for post-Franco Catalan bands and artists like Sopa de Cabra (2005) and Lluís Llach (2002) to perform 'One Night at the Liceu'-style concerts, and in recent years, popular singers such as Raphael have played at the theatre, opting to channel the prestige of the opera house for their concerts rather than the more usual venues of the Teatre Coliseum or Teatre Tívoli. Both are large-capacity theatres, but enjoys neither the opulence nor the national or the international prestige of the Liceu, which has seen that this kind of more popular concerts can be profitable, due to frequently higher ticket prices and 100% occupancy. These popular concerts hark back to the Liceu's more multi-purpose past from its creation up until the 1890s when it held masquerade balls and more popular forms of opera such as zarzuelas and musical theatre. This turn to promoting other ways to increase funding has been portrayed in the media as a measure of how severely the public funding has been reduced,²³⁸ all the

²³⁷ Imma Fernández, 'El TNC esquivia la crisi amb un rècord d'ocupació del 79,4%', *El Periódico*, 20 July 2011 <<http://www.elperiodico.cat/ca/noticias/oci-i-cultura/tnc-esquivia-crisi-amb-record-docupacio-del-794-1086257>> [accessed 17 March 2012]

²³⁸ Josep Massot, 'El arte se banaliza', *La Vanguardia*, 18 April 2012 <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/cultura/20120418/54284899762/arte-banaliza-vargas-llosa.html>> [accessed 25 April 2012]

while ignoring the fact that it seems to be a profitable course of action for the theatre, in addition to a return to the kind of programming the Liceu implemented historically. However, in spite of an increased private funding stream, the accumulated effect of the aforementioned public funding cuts was the presentation of an ERE (*Expediente de regulación de empleo* – a measure that allows institutions to suspend normal functioning and not pay its workers in case of financial difficulty) at the end of 2011 in order to save money. EREs have become a common recourse in Spain for companies that are unable to pay for their staff, and usually signify a severe cashflow problem. In the case of the ERE presented by the Liceu, 92% of the staff would be sent home for 57 days of the season,²³⁹ thus enabling the necessary €1.7m savings for the Liceu to carry on functioning. Given the Liceu's €48m budget for the 2011-12 season, this sum required for the continuing working of the theatre seems to be somewhat paltry, but was said in the media to be essential for the operation of the opera house. In response to this need, the workers at the Liceu took the unusual step of offering to not receive one of their monthly payments as a show of solidarity. This move was promptly rejected by the Human Resources department and executive of the theatre, monolithic in their refusal to budge on the issue; although never clearly stated, the executive was presumably exempt from the ERE. Given this lack of co-operation on the part of the management, the workforce organised various demonstrations outside the Liceu and gave interviews to the press to bring wider attention to their cause.

The effectiveness of the ERE is hard to judge; it certainly had a great impact on the Liceu workers; but given that the measure was withdrawn on the 22nd of February, it seems that it was an intimidation exercise on part of the executive to test the mettle of

²³⁹ Lourdes Morgades, 'El Liceo se retracta y retira el ERE para evitar una huelga de 18 días' *El País*, 23 February 2012 <http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2012/02/23/actualidad/1329953718_998627.html> [accessed 24 February 2012]

their workers and to judge the prevailing mood in the city. The workers and the president of the Liceu committee, Manuel Martínez, repeatedly petitioned Generalitat culture minister Ferran Mascarell to demand Joan Francesc Marco's resignation, to be replaced with someone with the vision to run the Liceu, as well as the skills, flexibility of vision and professionalism to capitalise on the prestige of the Liceu and to attract external funding. Martínez is then likely calling out for an executive director that is appointed on the strength of their suitability for the job rather than their political affiliation. The committee cites the ERE as a prime example of Marco's inability to judge the situation, control the crisis, or indeed consider the consequences of his actions.²⁴⁰ Marco has also come under fire from the Liceu's previous musical director, Sebastian Weigle, who, like his replacement Michael Boder, has criticised Marco's actions as 'illogical' and potentially harmful to the Liceu's international reputation.²⁴¹

The reasons for the Liceu's workers' demonstration bring us back to Mascarell's 'notable dysfunctions'; in his speech to the Parlament de Catalunya about the culture budget for the year 2011-12 he alludes to a serious problem that affects not only the Liceu but Spanish cultural institutions in general, citing a triptych of problems: what he calls 'bad governing' (possibly a reference to the rife and costly *amiguismo* [cronyism] that plagues many cultural institutions), illogical management and lack of civic responsibility.²⁴² His solution to these problems is a greater 'efficiency' in cultural management, and in the case of the Liceu, a reconstruction of the governing body to

²⁴⁰ EFE, 'Los empleados del Liceu piden la dimisión del director Joan Francesc Marco', *La Vanguardia*, 5 March 2012 <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/cultura/20120305/54264447506/empleados-liceu-piden-dimision-director-joan-francesc-marco.html>> [accessed 20 March 2012]

²⁴¹ EFE, 'Boder advierte que el Liceu puede convertirse en "un teatro italiano de provincias"', *La Vanguardia*, 15 February 2012 <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/cultura/20120215/54254626263/boder-advierte-liceu-puede-convertirse-teatro-italiano-provincias.html>> [accessed 20 March 2012]

²⁴² Diari de sessions del Parlament de Catalunya, 29 February 2012 <<http://www.parlament.cat/activitat/dspcc/09c246.pdf>> [accessed 28 August 2013]

ensure that the subscription holders have an official representative. This is particular pertinent as this is one of the areas that the Liceu has come under criticism for: its apparent lack of civil responsibility. This is evident in the myriad bodies that represent the various interest groups that are part of the Liceu government. Mascarell, in his presentation to the Catalan Parliament called it the Liceu's 'social implication';²⁴³ by this he means the remnants of the Liceu's traditional link to civil society as explored in the first chapter. Although owned by the merchant and entrepreneurial classes in Barcelona for many years and arguably still considered something of a high-end institution in the city, there is a tangible sense that the Liceu 'belongs' to the city. The decline of the theatre in the late 1970s was a manifestation of this lack of connection with Barcelona's civic society in that the theatre had become a symbol of the Francoist elite,²⁴⁴ in addition to the theatre's physical and programming decadence. A complementary initiative to the technical renovation of the Liceu in the late 1990s was, as I have already delineated, the creation of a simple slogan 'El Liceu de tots' to reconnect the new theatre to a larger demographic. Thus, the theatre would hopefully benefit from an increased income through a greater number of subscriptions from a wider spectrum of society. In addition, the theatre aimed to attract greater patronage from businesses and industry, thereby creating a modern version of the previous 'joint-stock' business model,²⁴⁵ and giving subscription holders and corporations alike a stake in it. As such, the Liceu would nominally become a truly democratic institution, with a

²⁴³ Anon., 'Mascarell admite que el Liceu tiene "un problema de gobernanza"', *La Vanguardia*, 29 February 2012 <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/cultura/20120229/54262741246/mascarell-liceu.html>> [accessed 5 March 2012]

²⁴⁴ This is discussed at length in *Destino* special edition magazine entitled 'Muere el Liceo?', *Destino*, 2019, 9-15 March 1978 <<http://mdc2.cbuc.cat/cdm/compoundobject/collection/destino/id/198351>> [accessed 15 March 2012]

²⁴⁵ Joan Ramon Resina, *Barcelona's Vocation of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 40.

strong link to civil society. Despite the initial success of the Liceu in recouping the civic link, Mascarell has criticised the opera house for neglecting it thanks to the generous subsidies of recent years, and this may be evidenced in the fall in income from patronage. Agustí Fancelli notes the drop from €6.9m in 2008-09 to €4.5m in the 2011-12 season, and compares it with the Teatro Real's €7m for the same year.²⁴⁶ Subscription holders have felt powerless in the face of programming cuts, and interviews in 2011-12 during the Liceu crisis with the management in the press have been oblique and answered few questions about the theatre's course of action.

POLITICS AND CULTURE: JOAN FRANCESC MARCO AND THE LICEU ERE

Although Ferran Mascarell referenced the mis-management of the Liceu in his speech to the Catalan Parliament, his accusations largely avoided pointing the blame directly at Joan Francesc Marco, the target of criticism from those workers affected by the Liceu ERE, who wished to see him replaced. Indeed, a group of subscription holders and supporters of the Liceu wrote a petition to Mascarell demanding Marco's resignation.²⁴⁷ At this point, it is worth noting Marco has a long history of working in cultural management, having been councillor of culture in his home city of Hospitalet de Llobregat, managing director of the Institut Nacional de les Arts Escèniques i la Música (part of the Ministry of Culture), as well as general administrator and councillor of the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya. At the time of his appointment to the Liceu (after previous director Rosa Cullell was moved to the Corporación Catalana de Medios

²⁴⁶ Lourdes Morgades, Daniel Verdú, 'La amenaza del ERE por la crisis coloca al Liceo al borde del abismo', *El País*, 13 January 2012 <http://ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2012/01/13/catalunya/1326490603_030490.html> [accessed 20 February 2012]

²⁴⁷ The petition can be found here: <<http://peticionpublica.es/PeticaoVer.aspx?pi=proliceu%20>> [Accessed 16 April 2012]

Audiovisuales), Marco was working at the Ciutat de la Música de Sabadell.²⁴⁸

Nevertheless, it is very likely that Marco was accorded these jobs due to his close ties to the Socialist Party that was in power (in a coalition) in Catalonia from 2003 to 2010 and in Spain from 2004 to 2011. Indeed, the list of Marco's previous appointments points to a highly-politicised sequence of jobs gained through his membership of the Socialist Party; furthermore, it is likely that he is an associate of Ferran Mascarell (who has his origins in the traditionally left-wing Barcelona City Council, although, as I mentioned earlier in the chapter, he currently stands as an independent in the right-wing CiU government). What was implicit from Mascarell's speech to the Parlament de Catalunya is that the Liceu had taken for granted two income streams that in many ways are the most vulnerable to change; public subsidies and subscriptions; the latter being the societal link that Mascarell considers the Liceu has neglected, all the while remaining dependent on its income.

However, that is not to say that the subscription holders should decide the programme of the Liceu; Joan Matabosch's cultural programming has repeatedly caused alarm amongst the more conservative part of the holders, who have frequently been left bewildered by the radical reinterpretations of classical works that he brings to the Liceu (for example 2007's *Wozzeck* and 2002's *Don Giovanni*, both at the hands of Calixto Bieito). This being said, whether due to programming issues (which I think unlikely) or financial issues, the Liceu lost over a thousand of its 18,000 subscription holders in the 2011-12 season; translating to about a six per cent reduction overall.²⁴⁹ income the Liceu could ill afford to lose given the reductions in public funding it is being subjected

²⁴⁸ Anon., 'Acuerdo para que Joan Francesc Marco sea el director del Liceo', *El País*, 18 June 2008 <http://elpais.com/diario/2008/06/18/catalunya/1213751262_850215.html> [accessed 1 March 2012]

²⁴⁹ Maricel Chavarría, "El Liceu no puede permitirse tener deuda", *La Vanguardia*, 2 February 2012. <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/musica/20120202/54248330550/liceu-deuda.html>> [Accessed 12 February 2012]

to, but less than the drop in subscriptions faced by the Teatro Real during the same period.²⁵⁰

In the face of such criticism and demands for his resignation, Marco has managed to retain his position by using the various organs of semi-management of the Liceu to keep him in his place; the association of ex-owners of the Liceu (those families that owned boxes in the Liceu during its days as a private entity), the Amics del Liceu (Friends of the Liceu), the Conservatory of the Liceu and the Cercle del Liceu (an historically important social branch of the Liceu) – grouped under the name Unió Liceu - as well as the Association of the subscription holders of the 4th and 5th floor were called to a lunch, affirming their ‘dedicated and enthusiastic support’ to the theatre.²⁵¹ When asked as to their opinion on the presentation of the ERE and the cancellation of various productions, the president of the Cercle del Liceu, Ignacio García Nieto, noted ‘we shall not comment on this, it is a decision for the theatre’s direction’²⁵². It is important to note, however, that Julio Molinario, president of the Amics del Liceu association admitted that despite the associations’ support of Marco’s plan of action, it did not necessarily mean the decision had the support of the members of the associations.²⁵³ Mascarell’s accusations of cronyism are thus born out; Marco, despite protests from the workers, has made use of the idiosyncratic set-up of the Liceu’s governing body to build up a power base through the myriad affiliated organisations, gaining their support in the face of large-scale opposition.

²⁵⁰ Susana Gaviña, ‘Ajuste de cuentas en el Teatro Real’, *ABC*, 20 September 2012 <<http://www.abc.es/20120920/cultura-musica/abci-mortier-dice-teatro-real-201209201626.html>> [accessed 28 August 2013]

²⁵¹ ‘Apoyo entregado y entusiasta’ cited in Lourdes Morgades, ‘Aficionados a la ópera y abonados del Liceo piden el cese del director del teatro’, *El País*, 8 February 2012 <http://ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2012/02/08/catalunya/1328731808_492948.html> [accessed 12 March 2012]

²⁵² ‘No opinamos sobre esto, es una decisión de la dirección del teatro’, *ibid.*

²⁵³ [Ibid.](#)

Interviews with Marco have been frustrating in their obliqueness and lack of answers.²⁵⁴ In a lengthy radio interview on the Catalunya Música programme *Una tarda d'òpera* with music critic Jaume Radigales at his own request, Marco avoided answering questions regarding the Liceu workers' show of solidarity by giving up part of their salary, as well as his apparent refusal to work with the Liceu's own governing structure on the issue. He remains elusively imprecise with regards to dates and facts, and continuously passes the buck to artistic director Joan Matabosch, who is not present in the interview, and when asked what he thought of reports that the Liceu's staff had found out about the ERE through the press, turned to another topic.

The question as to the impact of the ERE on the Liceu was asked by Maricel Chavarria of *La Vanguardia* in her interview with Marco; as might be expected, the executive response was that it would have little impact on the theatre's standing within the city and internationally.²⁵⁵ However, the Liceu's then musical director Michael Boder argued that the impact of having an unmotivated choir and orchestra would be disastrous, both to the quality of the work undertaken subsequently, and on the morale of the company. He suggested that if the choir and orchestra could not be employed by the Liceu, alternative arrangements be made to continue performing on an unpaid basis at concerts around the city, both as a measure to ensure visibility for the choir and orchestra, but also as something of a PR exercise to demonstrate that despite the ERE, the 'soul' of the Liceu was still alive and kicking. This resulted in charity concert entitled 'L'ànima del Liceu' on the 22nd of April 2012 in which the three musical directors since

²⁵⁴ Jaume Radigales, *Una tarda d'òpera*, 13 February 2012. Available in Catalan here: <<https://ximo.wordpress.com/2012/02/13/jaume-radigales-entrevista-a-joan-francesc-marco/>> [accessed 20 March 2012]

²⁵⁵ Maricel Chavarría, "El Liceu no puede permitirse tener deuda", *La Vanguardia*, 2 February 2012 <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/musica/20120202/54248330550/liceu-deuda.html>> [accessed 12 February 2012]

the 1994 fire, Bertrand de Billy, Sebastian Weigle and Michael Boder as well as incoming director Josep Pons conducted performances, along with renowned singers who have performed at the Liceu, such as Roberto Alagna, Linda Watson and Ainhoa Arteta. The performers have waived their fees, and the large screen that projected the performance was sponsored by a private investor. The concert, which had a €15 token entry fee to cover technical costs, was considered a success, but symbolically, it transcended mere circumstances and was held up by those present as a sign that the Barcelona bourgeois civic spirit that had got the theatre built had returned in the theatre's hour of need.²⁵⁶ After the concert, the Liceu workers once again petitioned Mascarell for Marco's resignation, claiming that he had 'disdained' their efforts.²⁵⁷

Marco's mistake, in my opinion, is that in the announcement of the ERE, he is disregarding a core of workers who do keep the Liceu running, and who have been working in the theatre longer than the bare four years Marco has been there. Weigle has warned that the orchestra and choir members will have no compunction in abandoning the Liceu given their treatment at the hands of the executive; and there is a widespread perception that it is the executive that is at fault here, not the workers, an opinion propounded by the evasive interviews and refusals from both Joan Francesc Marco and Joan Matabosch to discuss the current situations and future plan of action to national television reporters stationed outside the Liceu. The media blackout is also reflected in the reports that the Liceu workers found out about the ERE in the newspapers, artists

²⁵⁶ See Pilar Rahola's panegyric in *La Vanguardia*: P. Rahola, 'El alma del Liceu', *La Vanguardia*, 21 April 2012 <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/opinion/articulos/20120421/54285042304/pilar-rahola-el-alma-del-liceu.html>> [accessed 22 April 2012]

²⁵⁷ 'Los trabajadores del Liceu piden por carta el cese del director', *La Vanguardia*, 25 April 2012 <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/cultura/20120425/54285263531/trabajadores-liceu-piden-cese-director.html>> [accessed 2 May 2012]

who were contracted to perform at the Liceu got in contact to ask if their appearances were cancelled, as suggested by the press.²⁵⁸

This lack of answers from the direction of the theatre is frustrating. Indeed, what has happened to the Liceu is symptomatic of the greater cultural panorama in Barcelona precisely because the Liceu is arguably the city's most visible theatre. When asked a question as to why the Liceu has had to implement an ERE when the Teatro Real in Madrid and Valencia's Palau de les Arts have taken no such action, Marco simply referred to newspaper reports that the Teatro Real was registering losses between €0.5m and €1.5m yearly, and that, simply put, the Liceu could not afford this.²⁵⁹ The only course of action alluded to in the interview in *La Vanguardia* is one that might be expected; those productions that haven't sold especially well have been cancelled, Marco cited a 6.2% increase in the price of tickets, and perhaps importantly, has suggested that the need to programme a profitable repertoire has become a greater priority than maintaining the eclecticism of previous seasons. This is a trend that is reflected in the wider theatre programming in the city – a painful step for a city that prides itself on being forward-looking and non-traditional in comparison to other Spanish cities. A case in point here is the programming of the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya, who skirted controversy with a play *Gang Bang* set in a Barcelona gay club at the time of Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Barcelona in November 2010, but in 2011-12 decided to opt for a more subdued programme of Catalan classics like Verdaguer's

²⁵⁸ Lourdes Morgades, 'El Liceo se retracta y retira el ERE para evitar una huelga de 18 días', *El País*, 23 February 2012 <http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2012/02/23/actualidad/1329953718_998627.html> [accessed 15 March 2012]

²⁵⁹ Maricel Chavarría, "El Liceu no puede permitirse tener deuda", *La Vanguardia*, 2 February 2012 <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/musica/20120202/54248330550/liceu-deuda.html>> [accessed 12 February 2012]

Canigó, Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and revivals of the previous season's most commercially successful productions.

In a television appearance on the *Ànima* cultural programme on Catalan television, Joan Matabosch defended the price of the opera tickets,²⁶⁰ comparing them to the amount of money people spent on going to football matches, but agreed that the best way to ensure full houses and to favour a sustainable funding policy for the Liceu was to attempt to invest in the theatre as much as possible. He argued that the appointment of Josep Pons as musical director from 2012 onwards would bring up the standard of the orchestra and choir, which would in turn attract the star names that the Liceu requires to fill the house (he cites the full houses during the 2012 visit of the Bayreuth Festival as an example of how quality programming, singing and direction still attracts audiences). Despite the evident success of initiatives like the Bayreuth Festival in Barcelona, the opera house remains at the mercy of funding reductions from above that ignore the financial cycles of cultural institutions. In the case of the Liceu, productions are organised up to four years in advance, which makes sudden shortfalls in funding additionally complicated. Following the November 2012 announcement of a 33% reduction of the planned state contributions as approved in March of the same year, the Liceu faced a 30% fall in demand for tickets for the 2012-13 season. These already disheartening numbers were further aggravated by the VAT increase (in which the previously low special VAT rate of 8% applicable to cultural goods was removed, and the general new VAT rate 21% came into force) applied in September 2012 to the arts in general. According to *La Vanguardia*, the funding cuts mentioned above and the extra VAT costs would translate overall into a €4m budget reduction for the 2012-13

²⁶⁰ *Ànima*, 112, 15 October 2012 <<http://www.tv3.cat/3alacarta/#/videos/4289131>> [Accessed 17 January 2013]

year.²⁶¹ The central government's contribution to the Liceu had been reduced by 42.5% from the period 2011-2013, from €12m in 2011 to €6.9m in 2013.²⁶² Marco repeated pointed the blame at the varying government bodies for causing repeated crises at the Liceu, not only for their smaller contributions, but for the suddenness with which major funding cuts were consistently announced. Such a policy creates huge difficulties for the theatre, whose budget is drawn up four to five years in advance, and causes great embarrassment.²⁶³

Given the unstable outlook for cultural institutions, with the risk of further surprise funding cuts at any moment, executive director Joan Francesc Marco's strategy to combat the problem involved reducing the number of functions at the Liceu: citing the lower demand for tickets, his solution involved drastically cutting the number of performances for each opera, in theory maximising the occupation, which would in turn make the theatre more profitable per seat per performance. A large part of Marco's interview in *La Vanguardia* stated and restated the Liceu's inefficiency in many areas; the aforementioned reduction of the number of functions was brought into comparison with the Liceu's contemporaries. Marco cited that the Liceu's average number of functions in previous years had been 9 performances per opera; in the 2013-14 season, this was to be reduced to an average of 5.9. Justifying this, Marco cited the number of performances per opera for the Teatro Real, Covent Garden and La Scala (7.4, 6.9, and

²⁶¹ Maricel Chavarría, 'Joan Francesc Marco: "El Liceu debe reducir su número de funciones"', *La Vanguardia*, 29 November 2012 <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/cultura/20121129/54355941184/joan-francesc-marco-liceu-reducir-funciones.html>> [accessed 30 November 2012]

²⁶² Anon., 'El Gobierno reduce un 63,87% las aportaciones a equipamientos culturales catalanes en 2013', *La Vanguardia*, 28 October 2012 <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/local/barcelona/20121028/54353585557/el-gobierno-reduce-un-63-87-las-aportaciones-a-equipamientos-culturales-catalanes-en-2013.html>> [accessed 30 November 2012]

²⁶³ EFE, 'El director del Liceu dice que presentará en breve un plan de viabilidad del teatro', *El País*, 20 June 2012 <http://ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2012/06/20/catalunya/1340204016_271191.html> [accessed 30 November 2012]

7.7 respectively).²⁶⁴ In addition, the theatre's failure to respond to demand was cited by Marco as one of the reasons for the financial difficulties: the spectacular rebirth of the theatre after the fire heralded a surge in demand for subscriptions. Accordingly, the theatre programmed more functions to take this surge into account; post 2008, however, there was no longer the demand for seats on the non-subscribers' days to fill the theatre: the inference being that neither the 'popular' (i.e. cheaper) nor the 'standard' functions filled the theatre to capacity, seeing as there were two sets of prices for each function, each with its own cast. Given that (according to Marco) now people opted to attend the cheaper session, this meant that the more expensive days were less profitable despite being more expensive to put on. In the interview, Marco announced that there would no longer be a simultaneous two-tier pricing system, and that each opera would either be offered at the 'popular' or the 'normal' prices, depending on the cast.

Marco also refused to rule out a further salary reduction for the Liceu workers, although he cited the workers' flexibility as far as hiring and overtime as a positive step that has saved the theatre money. Another cost-cutting solution suggested by Marco in his efficiency drive was a greater flexibility on the part of the orchestra, choir and technical teams of the theatre, since he suggested that they 'can do other things because there will always be work to do'.²⁶⁵ Marco also cited an example of a Liceu worker whose remit had been expanded to avoid duplicating positions. An email circular from

²⁶⁴ Maricel Chavarría, 'Joan Francesc Marco: El Liceu debe reducir su número de funciones', *La Vanguardia*, 29 November 2012

<<http://www.lavanguardia.com/cultura/20121129/54355941184/joan-francesc-marco-liceu-reducir-funciones.html>> [accessed 30 November 2012]

²⁶⁵ 'Pueden hacer otras cosas porque siempre habrá trabajo que hacer'. Maricel Chavarría, 'Joan Francesc Marco: El Liceu debe reducir su número de funciones', *La Vanguardia*, 29 November 2012
<<http://www.lavanguardia.com/cultura/20121129/54355941184/joan-francesc-marco-liceu-reducir-funciones.html>> [accessed 30 November 2012]

the Liceu sent out to their mailing list in November 2012 clearly stated the problems the theatre was facing from both public cuts and lower income, and openly asked their recipients of the email to donate to the theatre, so that the season could continue. It drew on the Liceu's illustrious history in asking for donations 'for all the Liceu represents as a cultural symbol of our country and our city'.²⁶⁶ In the same month, *La Vanguardia* reported that the Liceu was forced to ask for a €6m bank loan to cover redundancy payments,²⁶⁷ prompting fears that the Liceu has liquidity problems. As a show of citizen support, the creation of the Actuem pel Liceu (Let's act for the Liceu), a civic platform designed as a non-official entity affiliated with the Liceu to encourage the kind of philanthropic donations as seen in other opera houses, offered various ways of contributing to the upkeep of the theatre, with a minimum spend of €50. Made up of representatives from the Cercle del Liceu, Amics del Liceu, and the 4th and 5th Floor Association, and the ex-part-owners of the Liceu, the association hoped to raise at least €1.5m in the 2012-13 period.

Marco also set out in his interview his intention to search for patronage abroad: he cited the fact that major opera houses and ballet companies operate specialised foundations in the United States with the aim of recruiting American philanthropy, and claimed that the Liceu is working on a similar type of foundation.²⁶⁸ In addition, Marco accepted that the opera experience was not part of the 'typical' Barcelona tourist

²⁶⁶ 'Por todo lo que representa el Liceu como símbolo cultural de nuestro país y de nuestra ciudad'. Text taken from the Actuem pel Liceu manifesto <http://www.actuem.liceubarcelona.cat/actuem-pel-liceu_cast.html> [accessed 30 November 2012]

²⁶⁷ 'Pueden hacer otras cosas porque siempre habrá trabajo que hacer'. Maricel Chavarría, 'Joan Francesc Marco: El Liceu debe reducir su número de funciones', *La Vanguardia*, 29 November 2012 <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/cultura/20121129/54355941184/joan-francesc-marco-liceu-reducir-funciones.html>> [accessed 30 November 2012]

²⁶⁸ Maricel Chavarría, 'Joan Francesc Marco: El Liceu debe reducir su número de funciones', *La Vanguardia*, 29 November 2012 <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/cultura/20121129/54355941184/joan-francesc-marco-liceu-reducir-funciones.html>> [Accessed 30 November 2012].

experience in the way it might be in Vienna, Paris, London or Berlin, and that a night at the opera in these cities might be considered an essential experience that it is not in Spain. This tied in with a concerted effort on the part of the city authorities to discourage cheap, low-spending tourists and to encourage more high-end, high-spending tourism.

JOAN FRANCESC MARCO'S APPEARANCE AT THE CATALAN PARLIAMENT

Given the lack of clarity of information of the exact situation the Liceu found itself in, Joan Francesc Marco was invited to clarify the circumstance of the theatre before the Parlament de Catalunya on the 20th of June 2012, which featured contributions from members of the Liceu's own committees (in this case Glòria Royo Roig and Susana Rodríguez from the Comitè d'Empresa, the Business Committee), representatives from all the political parties in the Parlament, and Joan Francesc Marco himself. The fact that Marco was called before the Parlament was remarkable in itself, since the organ rarely calls representatives of cultural institutions to account for themselves. Clearly the confusion of messages that was emanating from the Liceu merited an explanation. The appearance of the executive director in the Parlament before representatives of all the political parties in Catalonia was a unique chance to call the director to account and for him to succinctly explain precisely what the problems were at the Liceu, and to inform public representatives of the path the Liceu would take to resolve pending staffing issues and how it would tackle the ongoing funding problems.

Susana Rodríguez and Glòria Royo Roig appeared together to open the debate, squarely placing the blame at the inept direction of the theatre and describing the embarrassing situation that the ERE threw the theatre into:

‘The recent events, for us, have not been a mere anecdote. This lack of foresight, imagination and decision on the part of the direction has led us to a kafka-esque situation: the announcement of cancelled performances, the process of refunding the tickets, the announcement of the restoration of the season, the activation of ticket sales...all together brought us to a ridiculous moment before the public in general and the opera world internationally. These unnecessary decisions will cause the mistrust of the subscription holders, the public, Catalan society and the artists who work with the theatre.’²⁶⁹

Following on from their opening statement, Rodríguez and Royo set out a series of grievances to the Parlament, repeating their conviction that the problems at the Liceu had been avoidable, if it weren’t for the self-interested, oblique tone of the theatre’s direction. Marco did little to endear himself to those present by refuting the Comitè d’Empresa’s requests. When asked to respond to the Comitè d’Empresa’s demand that the executive salaries of an institution with a high level of public subsidy (44%) be made public and when questioned by various members of the Parlament committee about the ERE affecting the artistic workforce rather than the administrative, Joan Francesc Marco was evasive tone in his reply, and the frustration caused by Marco’s unwillingness to reveal the institution’s finances was discernible.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹ ‘Els últims esdeveniments, per nosaltres, no han estat una anècdota. Aquesta falta de previsió, imaginació i decisió per part de la direcció ens ha conduït a una situació kafkiana: l’anunci de cancel·lació de títols, el procés de devolució de les localitats, l’anunci de la reposició de la temporada, l’activació de la venda de les localitats..., tot plegat ens ha portat a un moment ridícul davant del públic i del panorama operístic internacional. Aquestes decisions innecessàries provocaran la desconfiança dels abonats, del públic, de la societat catalana i dels artistes que periòdicament col·laboren amb el teatre”. Glòria Royo Roig, member of the Comitè d’empresa of the Gran Teatre del Liceu. Video of Joan Francesc Marco’s appearance at the Parlament available at: <http://www.parlament.cat/web/actualitat/canal-parlament/sequencia/videos?p_cp1=1874737&p_cp3=1874752> and transcribed at <<http://www.parlament.cat/activitat/dspcc/09c344.pdf>> [Accessed 13 August 2013].

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

This kind of opacity is not unique to the Liceu, but is reflected all over Spain: a legacy of the tight interrelationships between politicians and those involved in culture in the 1990s and 2000s. As culture became equated with modernity, Europeanness and uniqueness, the past two decades have seen the Spanish regions pour public money into cultural installations that have become more personal and political totems than public services. The examples are numerous: Peter Eisenman's half-finished City of Culture built near Santiago de Compostela, the now-reopened Oscar Niemeyer museum in Avilés, and the Alcorcón Centre for the Creation of Arts, a large, incomplete complex in the suburbs of Madrid whose fate is uncertain.²⁷¹ Perhaps the most striking example of this over-investment in culture is the Partido Popular-ruled city of Valencia, which has become shorthand for the political collusion, opacity and profligacy in culture of recent years. The Ciutat de les Arts i Ciències is a dream-like confection of cultural installations named after members of the Spanish royal family lying in the old Turia river bed designed by ex-local Santiago Calatrava - he has since closed his Valencia office and transferred his assets to Switzerland. The Queen Sofía opera house is arguably the star of the complex: a huge, shimmering, stand-alone building that is undeniably impressive and self-important in what is otherwise an architecturally modest city. However, Valencia as a city has a negligible operatic tradition, and the building itself has suffered severe structural problems. Nevertheless, the collection of stunningly white (albeit already crumbling) buildings stands as a testament to the collaboration between this 'starchitect' and a political will to create a particular officially sanctioned 'culture' where there was arguably little tradition of this type of opera: merely the desire to ape the two most important cities in Spain without any real feasibility study into whether such a

²⁷¹ Francisco Javier Barroso, 'Adiós al macrocentro de Alcorcón', El País, 15 May 2012 <http://ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2012/05/15/madrid/1337115751_797297.html> [accessed 19 February 2013]

large theatre would be financially sustainable. This is especially surprising given the huge expense of the renovation of the Teatro Real. Once the prestige of the project has started to fade and the cracks (quite literally) begin to appear in the once-pristine façades, the true financial cost of the project starts to appear.

What arises (albeit perhaps to excess in the case of Valencia) is that there is a reluctance to make publically-funded institutions truly transparent, and politicians from both ends of the spectrum are participants in this exercise. As previously mentioned, the Liceu until relatively recently (2008) published their box office figures in the *Anuari Estadístic de Barcelona*, but this is no longer the case. The opacity of these institutions acts to a certain extent as a measure of the political course of the time: at a time when public finances are under the greatest scrutiny, the refusal to publish the budgets of publically-funded cultural organisations reflects the government's own lack of responsibility to the citizenry both in financial terms and in their provision of transparency and public service.

TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY: THE FUTURE OF THE LICEU

The current financial turmoil Spain finds itself in makes any kind of prognosis about the future of anything difficult. This being said, the recession has forced a real re-consideration of what is affordable and what is sustainable in cultural programming. The Liceu seems to be avoiding the decline of the 1960s and 1970s by concentration on the overall quality of the productions. The 2013 Bayreuth Festival and the success (both in terms of box office and in reviews) of the *Contes d'Hoffmann* (2013) have proved that

the Liceu is still capable of being a main player in terms of programming quality, despite cutbacks.²⁷²

In terms of the Liceu's public image, after the embarrassment of the ERE and the lack of representation from the administration, the welcoming of Josep Pons as musical director seems to have been a shot in the arm for the theatre and Joan Matabosch has made numerous contributions to both local and national newspapers with articles in *La Vanguardia* and *La Revista de Catalunya* in 2012, as well as cultural television programmes, setting out the stall of the Liceu, presenting the theatre's programme in the face of the unavoidable, and highly-publicised funding cuts.²⁷³ This active promotion and publicisation of the Liceu can only be a good thing – the problem with the ERE that caused the Liceu most embarrassments was the lack of responsibility or explanation on the part of any of the executive staff for any of the actions taken. Never was the Liceu less 'de tots' than in that moment: the monolithically blank, absent, reaction of the leadership of the theatre to the imminent crisis showed another side of the theatre that was very far from the ideals of shared 'ownership' that the 'Liceu de tots' programme had promoted. The sudden removal of the ERE soon after it was implemented was an embarrassing wrong move for the theatre management, as it seemed as though they were merely calling the workers' bluff, rather than taking a decision that might have serious financial consequences for the theatre.

²⁷² Maricel Chavarría 'Hoffmann en el Liceu: romanticismo contra las penas', *La Vanguardia*, 5 February 2013 <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/local/barcelona/20130205/54365087645/index.html>> [accessed 28 August 2013] and Jorge Binaghi 'Cuentos sombríos', *Mundo Clásico*, 11 February 2013 <<http://www.mundoclasico.com/ed/documentos/doc-ver.aspx?id=ae0b22cd-a915-425b-9081-d839fea9dcbc>> applauded the high quality of the acting, singing and orchestra in this production.

²⁷³ Francesc Cortès, 'Francesc Cortès entrevista Joan Matabosch', *La Revista de Catalunya*, 280 (2012), 111-132 (p. 118).

For this reason, the importance of removing Joan Francesc Marco, I would argue at the time of writing (February 2013), remains of paramount importance. By contrast, Joan Matabosch's appearances in the press overflow with his dedication and commitment to the Liceu – his legacy is indisputably impressive. Marco's tactics, on the contrary, have provided nothing but embarrassment for the theatre at a time when public perception of cultural institutions plays a critical part in their ability to attract both public funding and private money. Attracting customers to retain their custom (and spending power) is key during times of economic difficulty: supermarkets fight competitively to both prise custom away from their rivals, but also to make sure their existing customers do not spend money elsewhere. This is precisely the kind of strategy the Liceu must persevere with. The pre-recession years allowed the theatre a rich cushion of public funding that permitted the institution to get away with more risky programming that did not necessarily have to heed the tastes of the subscription holders, and could therefore afford to be a touch more post-modern, less conservative. These more radical interpretations still have their place, however, in that they have shaped the tastes of the *liceísta*. The unusual has become the norm at the Liceu, and the opera-goers accustomed to unusual interpretations of new operas. The customers remain as demanding as ever, but are able to judge operas without the shock of the new.

Never before has spending (both public and private) been under such scrutiny as in mid-recession Spain. Repeated revelations of misspent money, budget overspends and politicians embezzling money have created a public that is cynical and arguably demands value for money if they are to spend their ever-shrinking disposable income on cultural goods and services. As such, there is an ever greater necessity for cultural production to be considered 'value-for-money'; a demand not that culture necessarily be cheap, but that it respond to a quality-price ratio. The sold-out Wagner season at the

Liceu in 2012-13 is proof enough that even when money is not as free-flowing as it was, that people will pay for what they consider 'not to be missed' culture. However, the Liceu cannot depend exclusively on external stimuli to fill the seats in the theatre, and Joan Francesc Marco's move to reduce the number of functions per performance may be a step in the right direction – there is apparently not the demand to fill the previous average number of functions per performance, and as such the theatre must respond to the demand there is for its productions. Although the Liceu understandably works to a long timetable of scheduling productions up to four years in advance (as with most major international opera houses), recent years have proved that this is unworkable in a climate of waning demand and uncertain funding.

As Joan Matabosch mentioned in his interview with *Ànima*, the theatre needs to move towards a more American form of funding which shifts the onus of funding onto the private sector, which has resulted in the creation of the Liceu Barcelona Opera House US Foundation in early 2013.²⁷⁴ Such a task should historically be easier for the Liceu given its history of private funding contributions, but there is a huge demand for sponsors – a lot of people pressuring businesses who are themselves struggling. This is not the first time the Liceu has suffered problems and cutbacks in its history; but they are different to those faced in the past. In the space of twenty years, the Liceu went from being one of the best-regarded, albeit woefully decrepit theatres in Europe to being one of the best-funded and technologically advanced, with an almost deluxe programming that allowed it to put on some of the most remarkable operatic productions of recent years (a personal favourite was 2010's *Carmen* by Calixto Bieito, a work that challenged

²⁷⁴ EFE, 'El Liceu buscarà a Nova York 100.000 dòlars per al finançament de projectes', *Ara*, 28 February 2013 < http://www.ara.cat/cultura/Liceu-Nova-York-financament-projectes_0_874112777.html > [accessed 28 August 2013]

traditional visions both of the opera and of Spanish identity itself – this production is explored further in Chapter 4).²⁷⁵

The complexity of the problems at the Liceu is symptomatic of wider problems in the governance of Spanish culture, and indeed of the current economic situation in general. While figures about the actual cuts are published in the press, the real impact of this in terms of percentages (for example) is not clear. As mentioned before, a 15% from one institution is rarely expressed in relation to what it means as an overall percentage, thus compounding the difficulty in working out the real effect of the cutback on the theatre.

As all over Europe, the reduction of public funding brings into question what is considered 'essential' public culture; what is necessary and what is luxury. Although the concept might well be entirely subjective, in times of little funding, in order to attract money, institutions may have to exchange their dynamism and eclecticism in favour of a more conservative, but arguably more profitable line of culture. Shorn of its public funding, the Liceu (along with many other Barcelona theatres) has had to return to bowing to market forces and justifying their funding through evaluation from the Conselleria de Cultura. Although an unpopular measure which has converted Ferran Mascarell into the pariah of the city's culture, it may well increase efficiency, competition and consequently greater collaboration between artistic institutions. In the case of the Liceu, Mascarell has reminded the theatre of its slogan 'el Liceu de tots',²⁷⁶ introduced after the reopening of the theatre in 1999 to bring it closer to the citizens of

²⁷⁵ Maria M. Delgado, 'Calixto Bieito: A Catalan Director on the International Stage', *Theatre Forum*, 26 (2005), 10-24, p. 14.

²⁷⁶ Europa Press, 'Mascarell admite que el Liceu tiene "un problema de gobernanza" y anuncia cambios en la comisión ejecutiva', *La Vanguardia*, 29 February 2012 <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/local/barcelona/20120229/54262085111/mascarell-admite-que-el-liceu-tiene-un-problema-de-gobernanza-y-anuncia-cambios-en-la-comision-ejecu.html>> [accessed 2 March 2012]

Barcelona. Arguably, the Liceu has lost the focus of its 'social implication' (i.e. a consideration for subscription holders and patrons that repeatedly invest their money in the Liceu, a sense of mutual trust and interdependence) to its comfortable public funding, but the increasing lack of this funding seems a judicious time to re-establish this social link, a resource that other theatres may not be able to count on.

In addition to the recovering of this social link, in the wake of the sudden cancellation of the ERE despite the executive's insistence that the it was the only way the theatre would save money, the theatre's committee has demanded a new management model in which they ask 'that the people that brought us to this sad, painful and unnecessary situation not carry on as a part of the new stage (i.e. the reform of the theatre's model) we are now beginning'.²⁷⁷ Through renouncing their 'pago extra' (one of the two extra payments Spanish workers often receive as part of their wage in December and June), early retirements and voluntary leaving, the committee hopes to restructure the theatre and slim down the admittedly oversized workforce. Mascarell noted that these measures were somewhat late, but praised their announcement, and trusted that through word-of-mouth and the fact of creating this more efficient, cost-saving model would restore the Liceu's reputation amongst the citizens and patrons that it most needs.

One could almost compare the Liceu's supporters to those of a football team; although loyal to the extreme, they demand to be heard, and are disgruntled with how

²⁷⁷ 'Que las personas que nos han llevado hasta esta situación penosa, dolorosa e innecesaria no continúen formando parte de la nueva etapa que ahora se inicia'. Lourdes Morgades, 'El Liceo se retracta y retira el ERE para evitar una huelga de 18 días', *El País*, 23 February 2012 <http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2012/02/23/actualidad/1329953718_998627.html> [accessed 5 August 2013]

the crisis has been handled.²⁷⁸ Over 2,800 of the subscribers have signed the abovementioned petition demanding Marco's resignation, and Lourdes Morgades notes the general discontent expressed in the press on the part of the public, who received the news that various productions had been cancelled through a mass mailing rather than a more formal announcement; a sign of the lack of the 'societal link' Mascarell finds lacking in the Liceu's recent dealings.

It remains to be seen whether Marco will be sacrificed for the good of the Liceu; it is likely that he will not. Nevertheless, whether Marco is scapegoated or not, it is clear that the Liceu's direction has repeatedly mis-stepped in their management of the crisis, from their initial refusal to negotiate with the workforce and their lack of clarity and transparency in their dealings with the press to their cancellation of the ERE. Such actions have caused the management to appear foolish, inconsiderate and inexperienced. It is the communication blackout, more than the ERE, that has harmed the theatre's reputation, and in the face of the Teatro Real's smug admission that it could apparently run at a loss, makes the theatre seem embarrassingly provincial and immature, as noted by musical director Michael Boder above on page 167.

Despite the awkward handling of the crisis at the Liceu, it is important to focus on the end result of the negotiations. Late though it may be, the agreement reached with the workforce to work together for the greater good of the Liceu. The implementation of measures to eradicate the cronyist tendencies that undoubtedly affect the institution, and an effective reorganisation the theatre for greater efficiency to restore and prioritise the link its patrons to encourage and ensure its private income (if carried through properly) could become a model for other cultural institutions in Spain. This

²⁷⁸ Lourdes Morgades, 'El Liceo se retracta y retira el ERE para evitar una huelga de 18 días', *El País*, 23 February 2012. <http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2012/02/23/actualidad/1329953718_998627.html> [accessed 5 August 2013]

will to carry the theatre through difficult economic times has been manifested in the April 2012 'L'ànima del Liceu' concert; it seems that the workers and benefactors of the Liceu are willing to put in the effort to see the theatre flourish, but that Joan Francesc Marco is unwilling to participate. Arguably, this is a measure of how inept the executive director really is, sidelining the loyal allegiance and support that the theatre inspires amongst some sections of Barcelona society in exchange for a greater control over a theatre that he is ill-suited to run, either artistically or financially.

Nevertheless, the arrival of Josep Pons in 2012 augurs positively for the theatre: Pons has a long and distinguished career – he was a cofounder of the Teatre Lliure Chamber Orchestra in 1985, and was director of music at the 1992 Olympics. In addition he led the City of Granada orchestra for ten years to great acclaim,²⁷⁹ before moving on to the Spanish National Orchestra. On both occasions he took his post on in the midst of difficult situations for each orchestra and successfully guided them through complex structural changes, making him a heavyweight cultural figure with a proven successful track record. In addition, he has worked with the Liceu since 2009 on a semi-permanent basis as the main guest conductor,²⁸⁰ and has conducted the premieres of La Fura dels Baus's *D.Q. Don Quixote en Barcelona*, *Gaudí* by Joan Guinjoan (2004-05) and *La Fattucchiera* by Vicenç Cuyàs (2001-02) at the Liceu, showing a clear commitment to the theatre's use of local composers and productions. The team formed by Joan Matabosch and Josep Pons displays a clear commitment to excellence, development and improvement in terms of structural, musical and production renovation. It is to be

²⁷⁹ Jesús Ruiz Mantilla, 'El músico catalán Josep Pons será el nuevo director de la Orquesta Nacional de España', *El País*, 27 March 2003 <http://elpais.com/diario/2003/03/27/cultura/1048719608_850215.html> [accessed 13 August 2013]

²⁸⁰ ACN Barcelona, 'Josep Pons, nou director musical del Liceu', *Avui*, 5 October 2010 <<http://www.elpuntavui.cat/noticia/article/5-cultura/19-cultura/312431-josep-pons-nou-director-musical-del-liceu.html>> [accessed 13 August 2013]

hoped that their work together takes the Liceu into a period of fruitful creation and collaboration without the interference of ill-qualified bureaucrats promoted by Spain's problematic politicisation of culture.

**CHAPTER 5: PRODUCING BARCELONA: CALIXTO BIEITO'S *CARMEN*
(2010), LA FURA DELS BAUS'S *LE GRAND MACABRE* (2011) AND CAROL
LÓPEZ'S *COSÍ FUN TUTTE* (2012)**

Joan Matabosch's period as artistic director of the Liceu has prioritised the nurturing of home-grown talent, promoting the Liceu as a local institution with an international reach. The rich recent history of performing arts in Catalonia with groups such as La Fura dels Baus, Els Joglars, Els Comediants, actor/directors like Oriol Broggi and playwrights such as Carol López and Pau Miró (as mentioned in Chapter 1) that have shaped the course of Catalan dramaturgy (in the case of the performance groups from the late 1970s onwards, and in the case of the playwrights, from the late-1990s onwards) have provided a rich seam of talent for the Liceu to make use of in Matabosch's programme to innovate in opera by bringing new, local visions of the art to the *liceistes*.

The Liceu connotes prestige, a demanding audience, but also presents an opportunity to make use of a theatrical space unique within Barcelona for its history, size and technical facilities, without the attendant political connotations of staging a play in either the Ciutat del Teatre or the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya (even if the Liceu, of course, comes with its own set of expectations). This set up benefits both director and theatre: the former gains from the prestige of premiering in one of Spain's top opera houses and the latter gains from attracting a different, more aesthetically modern work potentially built around a local sensibility that challenges more traditional mould of opera productions and in doing so, projects itself as an opera house open to innovative versions of operas. In a city that has projected itself for the last

twenty years at the vanguard of modern Spanish (and European) culture, the Liceu has chosen incorporate the energy of the creative arts and the previously noted theatre creators in Barcelona as part of this larger modern trend of modernising and re-inventing opera works. Thus, the theatre has introduced contemporary productions of operas to a new audience that has been sensitized to modern culture almost through osmosis due to Barcelona's constant searching to be at the forefront of contemporary culture, as delineated in Joan Ramon Resina's *Barcelona's Vocation of Modernity*, in which the city seeks to create modern, yet-transnational culture with accessible, yet specifically Catalan (or indeed *barceloní*) cultural references, with the intention of reinforcing Barcelona's cultural capital as a city at the forefront of contemporary culture.

THE GRAN TEATRE DEL LICEU: FROM OPERA HOUSE TO CONCERT HALL

Part of Joan Matabosch's remit as artistic director since he joined the Liceu in 1994 under Albin Hänseroth, and through his ascent through the ranks to assistant director until his naming as artistic director by then-executive director Josep Caminal in 1998, has been to slowly adapt the Liceu's out-moded system of diva worship to the necessities of post-modern dramaturgies to create works that were both modern and relevant a new audience the Liceu ('el Liceu de tots') and the life-long Liceu devotees ('de tota la vida'). In an interview with *L'Avenç* magazine in 2010, Matabosch was quoted as having asked for a ten-year planner on his first day in his job as artistic director,²⁸¹ realising the importance of forward planning in both his desire to create co-productions and in giving the theatre coherence in programming. One of the most

²⁸¹ Josep M. Muñoz, 'Joan Matabosch: El programa del Liceu', *L'Avenç*, 354, February 2010 (16-26), p. 16.

pressing issues of the post-Franco period was that the Liceu had not moved with the aesthetic shifts of the times, preferring to cultivate an overly sentimental relationship between the audience and the singers – something Matabosch puts down to the international isolation Spain faced in the post-war period and the success of Catalan singers like Victòria de los Àngeles and Montserrat Caballé.²⁸²

An important part of Matabosch's programming plan, even as an assistant director was to coordinate the dramaturgical department and the press department, allowing him to introduce both new dramaturgical currents adopted by the Central European opera houses and to disseminate this shift in the Liceu's productions by means of the publications available at Matabosch's disposal and making use of his training in journalism. In addition to incorporating the new streams of aesthetic trends at the time flourishing across Europe, Matabosch was keenly aware of the need to attract a new public to the theatre, and started to gradually incorporate more Spanish and Catalan composers and works – both traditional and modern – as a part of the theatre's renovation of its theatrical repertoire. Indeed, since 1999 most years have included works by Catalan composers or work drawn from Catalan sources (an interesting precursor to this is Xavier Benguerel's production of *El llibre Vermell*, a collection of traditional Catalan songs taken from the Codex Montserratina, produced in 1988). In recent years, from 2006 onwards, there has been a wide assortment of works from Catalan composers, such as the aforementioned *Jo, Dalí*, Hèctor Parra's *Hypermusic Prologue* (2009-10), Amadeu Vives's *Doña Francisquita* (2009-10), Lleonard Balada's *Hangman! Hangman!* and its follow-up *The Town of Greed* (both performed in chamber opera format in 2007-8), Xavier Montsalvatge's *El gato con botas* (Puss in Boots, 2006-

²⁸² Francesc Cortès, 'Francesc Cortès entrevista Joan Matabosch', *La Revista de Catalunya*, 280 (2012), 111-132, p. 116.

7), Enric Granados's *María del Carmen* (2005-6), Joan Guinjoan's *Gaudí*, and Valencian Carlos Santos's *La meua filla sóc jo* (presented at the Teatre Lliure), both produced in 2004. The work of a fellow Valencian reappears in 2011 with Vicent Martín i Soler's *L'arbore de Diana*. 2003 saw another Xavier Montsalvatge work, *Babel 46*. With these productions the Liceu is both promoting novel work from local composers as well as revisiting work from earlier generations of composers.

The above list gives some indication to the Liceu's involvement in the promotion of local operatic creations – although Catalonia does have a tradition of musical talent (Josep Carreras, Montserrat Caballé, Enric Granados are all examples of this), the Liceu has made a concerted effort to include Catalan productions and operas into its programme as a way of reflecting Barcelona's own international prestige at an operatic level. The inclusion of these incredibly varied formats and works also functions as a sound endorsement of what Matabosch's function as an artistic director is: not to choose works that please him or his patrons, but to introduce new works to an audience that has become more and more disposed to new interpretations of old works and accepts novel forms of dramaturgy applied to an art form perceived of as old-fashioned and reactionary.

The fact of the Liceu's transformation from decrepit outmoded *coliseu* (as the theatre is frequently referred to in the press) to technically advanced concert venue was not lost on artists visiting Barcelona. In 2001, Icelandic singer Björk became the first electronic artist to play her work at the Liceu when she played her album *Vespertine* with the experimental duo Matmos, as well as a 54-piece orchestra accompanied with a choir of Eskimos. Although evidently not classical opera, the theatre was clearly suited to the large-scale concert that Björk's ethereal sets demanded; it had the capacity for a large orchestra, choir, and met the technical demands of a modern electronic/pop

concert. By embracing more modern artists to make use of their facilities, the Liceu was fulfilling its 'Liceu de tots' premise; in addition to maintaining a distinctively modern, forward-looking operatic and classical programme, the Liceu proved that it was open to more contemporary, innovative musical influences. This is something of a return to form for the Liceu, since during the 19th century it had been a rather more multi-purpose space, offering zarzuela, masquerade balls, recitals, popular dances and concerts in addition to the opera for which it is best known. In the wake of Björk's concert, the Liceu became a 'special event' venue for many artists; shortly after this first 'modern' concert, legendary *folclórica* singer Isabel Pantoja celebrated her 20 years in the music industry with a special concert at the Liceu in October 2002, and since then, the Liceu has become a popular stop for Spanish and international singers on their tour circuit. The roster of artists that have passed through the Liceu feature aging singers (for example, Raphael, Julio Iglesias, Isabel Pantoja) whose target audience is largely middle-aged, more modern flamenco artists like Diego el Cigala (2010), Miguel Poveda (2012), and singers and bands like Malú, Pastora (also in 2012). The Liceu offers a comfortable, 'civilised' concert venue; the prestige of the opera house contributes to the 'legendary' reputation of the artist playing. These concerts are marketed as a decidedly upmarket alternative to the concerts at the other theatres in Barcelona.

The Liceu also makes an attempt to 'fer país' (to 'make [a Catalan] country' i.e. to maintain a Catalan identity), to borrow ex-president Jordi Pujol's phrase, inviting local singer-songwriters like Raimon to play at the Liceu, an artist whose emotional and cultural resonance is such that political figures were spotted at his opening night at the theatre.²⁸³ The inclusion of the Xàtiva-born artist is a clear indication of the will of

²⁸³ Miquel Jurado, 'El grito de una cultura', *El País*, 1 December 2012 <http://ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2012/12/01/catalunya/1354393393_927067.html> [accessed 4 January 2013]

Catalan politicians to include the Valencian community and the Balearic Islands as part of the Catalan cultural sphere, This role as a concert hall is an important one for the Liceu in the modern day, as it contributes to it once more becoming a more popular (in the sense of people) venue. This may tempt concert-goers back to the theatre for an operatic visit.

To this end, this chapter takes three performances from the Liceu's 2009-10, 2010-11 and 2011-12 seasons as representative of the opera house's project of using Barcelona or Catalan directors to create new readings of traditional operas and the extent to which they have created effective *Gesamtkunstwerke* that reflect Barcelona's curious state as a capital deprived of capital that has ambitions to provide an epicentre of both Catalan culture and 'European' culture. The three works chosen are: Calixto Bieito's *Carmen* (2010), La Fura dels Baus's *Le Grand Macabre* (2011) and Carol López's *Cosí FUN Tutte* (2012).

Calixto Bieito, although not strictly a Barcelona native (he was born near Burgos, in the Castilla y León region) is one of Matabosch's closest collaborators, and has presented his work on numerous occasions at the Liceu. Many of his radical, exciting productions premiered at the Liceu before moving on to other theatres to scandalise the rest of Europe, and Bieito's now-infamous work has outraged *liceístas* for well over a decade: his decadent, uncompromising productions of *Un ballo in maschera* (2000), *Don Giovanni* (2002, 2008) and *Wozzeck* (2005) have since become key moments in the Liceu's performance history. In radicalising the content (or perhaps merely adjusting it to more contemporary, relevant mores) and providing an unarguably more modern aesthetic to traditional performances of operas, Bieito has created some of the most startling performance pieces of recent years, fostered by the liberal artistic direction and (relatively) forgiving Liceu audience, who, it could be argued, act as a barometer for

a production's wider success. His 2010 production of *Carmen* is arguably one of his most accomplished and suitable works in the Liceu context. His reconfiguration of the piece as a modern tale of sexuality in the repressive surroundings of an anonymous military barracks is a highly successful take on Bizet's story of the gypsy girl in charge of her destiny.

In addition to the frequent collaborations with Bieito, the Liceu has also turned to the world of Catalan theatre directors to collaborate in directing performances. Terrassa playwright Sergi Belbel (the head of the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya, 2006-2013) signed *Il viaggio a Reims* in 2002-3, and Àlex Rigola (then director of the Teatre Lliure) directed *The Flying Dutchman* in 2006-7, and Lluís Pasqual (currently head of the Teatre Lliure) worked on *Le nozze de Figaro* (2008-9, 2011-12) and Xavier Albertí (Belbel's replacement at the TNC in 2013) directed the new piece *Jo, Dalí, (I, Dalí, 2011-12)*.

Although the Liceu's work with these directors at the forefront of modern Catalan theatre is undoubtedly important, its collaboration with performance troupes like Els Comediants and La Fura dels Baus that have provoked some of its most thought-provoking and novel work. This could arguably be down to performance troupes' greater understanding of collective work and sense of space; both necessities for the creation of an operatic spectacle. At this point, it might be worth remembering La Cubana's affectionate ribbing of the opera world in their intriguing 2001 piece *Una nit d'òpera* as a work that was able to fill an opera space but retain a human scale. Another of the performance troupes that have been successful at the Liceu is Els Comediants, who grew out of the cultural explosion that took place in the 1980s in Spain, Els Comediants, led by Joan Font, are a company based in the seaside town of Canet de Mar, and are known for their non-classical performances that usually have neither text nor

director. Their free-form, fluid work became known internationally for their orchestration of the closing ceremony of the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games, and they have collaborated with the Liceu on two occasions: *La petita flauta màgica* (The Magic Flute, 2001, revived 2012), and *La Ventafocs* (La Cenerentola, 2008). On both occasions Els Comediants created a Catalan-language production aimed at younger viewers, and both have been successful exercises in bringing opera to a new, bilingual generation, successfully blending their own highly-visual stage techniques with the material at hand. In fact, newspaper *El Mundo* cites *La petita flauta màgica* as the Petit Liceu's most successful project.²⁸⁴

Another performance group that have visited the Liceu and brought their own unmistakable, physical style to the theatre is La Fura dels Baus, a group born out of the street theatre traditions at the Festival de Sitges in the 1980s. Their sophisticated use of scale, architectural sculpture and innovative staging techniques suited the scale and modernity that the Liceu sought after the re-opening, and their collaboration *D.Q. Don Quijote en Barcelona* (2000) was an aggressively modern counterpoint to the florid tradition of Espert in *Turandot* the previous year. *D.Q.* used large, zeppelin-like structures, choirs, gantries, levels and acrobatics to fill the Liceu stage with a dystopian future that retold a twisted version of the Don Quijote story with Orwellian overtones. Perhaps like no other work mentioned in this chapter, this was an authentically local, Barcelona-flavoured work that drew both on local and national talent to create an unusual and original work that reflected a city, a troupe and an opera house that were at the apex of their success. After the success of *D.Q.*, La Fura collaborated once more with the Liceu in a production of Ligeti's *Le Grand Macabre* in 2011, a startlingly dystopian

²⁸⁴ 'Liceu. Cómo se puede sobrevivir al éxito', 'Documentos' section of *El Mundo*, 7 October 2009, p.8.

tale of decadence and neglect highly suited to La Fura dels Baus's theatrics. This performance makes up the second subject of this chapter on performance at the Liceu.

For the third production the Liceu turned to the artistic director of the Villarroel, Carol López, a Barcelona native whose work had often been premiered at the aforementioned theatre. Her productions of *V.O.S. (Versión Original Subtitulada)* (2005) at the Teatre Lliure and *Germanes* (Sisters, 2008) were highly successful both critically and at the box office *V.O.S.* and *Germanes* were later turned into films, and the latter won various theatre awards, including a Catalan Theatre MAX award, a Butaca award and a Barcelona Critics' Association award. The work chosen for adaptation was *Cosí fan tutte*, Mozart's tragicomedy of sexual errors, a work that fitted well into López's style of theatre which is marked by an exploration of the physical and psychological relationship between the sexes in many of her works.

The three pieces, Calixto Bieito's *Carmen*, La Fura dels Baus's *Le Grand Macabre* and Carol López's *Cosí FUN Tutte*, are highly modern in their approach to opera, and in the case of the first and third operas, offer new insights and approaches to stalwarts of the operatic repertoire, bringing a new vision of events to them. *Carmen* is taken from oft-portrayed roots in a romantic southern Spain to a bleak, anonymous border town populated with the military, greed and easy money. In the case of *Le Grand Macabre*, La Fura dels Baus's visceral aesthetic, featuring a large, decaying doll onto which images of decadence are projected, suits Gyorgy Ligeti's tale of illness, malaise and death perfectly. *Cosí fan tutte*, however, was reconfigured for a younger audience within the Petit Liceu remit mentioned above, which simplified the story and instead of the entire score, included musical highlights from the piece. The condensation of the piece is designed with a younger audience in mind, but the success with which this was

achieved in the case of Mozart's 'romantic comedy' will be discussed further on (see pp. 225-236).

The three operas chosen have been deeply affected by the ongoing financial crisis in Spain, and reflect the conditions described in the previous chapter and its own set of financial circumstances and the repercussions this has in each case. As such, the works described give some idea of the Liceu's commitment to contemporary, relevant re-interpretations of repertory works and show how their understanding of their role as an international opera house has been shaped by a nurturing of local talent.

'UNA CARMEN MÁS MADURA': CALIXTO BIEITO AND HIS RETURN TO THE LICEU (2010)

The current economic background of the arts in Catalonia has forced arts companies to draw up new strategies for filling houses and gaining further funding. The reduction in the Generalitat's Culture Department budget (from €334.4m in 2010-2011 to €282.3m in 2011-12, a cut of 15.6%)²⁸⁵ has meant that theatres have had to adopt measures to increase their efficiency, while at the same time attracting paying audiences. In the case of the Liceu, the funding reductions from government institutions both on regional and state level in 2010 have severely affected their finances; the Generalitat has reduced their contribution from by €1.7m, a 15% reduction,²⁸⁶ and in summer 2010, the Ministry of Culture announced a 10% reduction in their contribution to the theatre over three years,²⁸⁷ with a likely further cut in the coming years. In the light of this, the Liceu

²⁸⁵ Generalitat de Catalunya. (2011). *Projecte de pressupostos 2011-12*. <http://premsa.gencat.cat/pres_fsvp/docs/2011/05/31/13/58/01a99d41-52b6-4882-b70b-fb5d5fb27ba2.pdf> [accessed 1 September 2011]

²⁸⁶ Lourdes Morgades, 'El presupuesto del Liceo cae en dos años 10 millones de euros', *El País*, 22 February 2011. <http://www.elpais.com/articulo/cataluna/presupuesto/Liceo/cae/anos/millones/euros/elpepiespcat/20110222elpcat_13/Tes> [accessed 12 August 2011]

²⁸⁷ Lourdes Morgades, 'El recorte de subvenciones deja al Liceo sin programación en septiembre', *El País*, 21 February 2011. <http://www.elpais.com/articulo/cultura/recorte/subvenciones/deja/Liceo/programacion/septiembre/elpepucul/20110221elpepucul_10/Tes> [accessed 12 August 2011]

was forced to undertake a different approach to the financing of the institution, and with its budget having been cut by a third and a number of productions cancelled, the necessity of filling the house to capacity could be judged even more urgent.

Given this difficult financial context, the choice of Calixto Bieito's controversial production of *Carmen*, a revival from the 1999 Festival de Peralada, might be interpreted as a canny mix of controversy and money-making for the production that both opened and closed the 2010-11 season. As an opener, it ensured column inches in the press for the Liceu, and as a closer to the season it would be a lucrative summer tourist season production. In addition, the perennial appeal of *Carmen* as an opera, Bieito's reputation for controversy as borne out by the frequent use of 'controversial' and 'polemical' in press reviews of his work, as well as the proven success of his production from Peralada played in the Liceu's favour. Furthermore, the political and social context of recent years, to be covered later in this chapter, while arguably coincidental, resulted in *Carmen* being judged one of the most culturally significant and relevant productions of the season and marked the end of a 17-year absence from the opera house's repertoire.

Bieito's visually-demanding, controversial productions have turned him into one of the most sought-after directors in Europe, and his stagings are vociferously debated in the press by those who consider his work modern and necessary for the survival of opera into the 21st century and those who vocally condemn the Tarantino-esque violence, fetishisation and sexualisation of his productions.²⁸⁸ Productions like 2001's *Un ballo in maschera*, controversially staged with a row of men on the toilet with their

²⁸⁸ See, for example, Maria Delgado, 'Calixto Bieito: Staging excess in, across and through Europe', *Contemporary European Directors* (London: Routledge, 2010), Ch. 14 and Sarah Wright, '[Consuming Passions: The Aesthetics of Cultural Consumption in Calixto Bieito's Don Giovanni \(2001\)](#)', *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 5, 3 (2004), 317-39.

trousers around their ankles, 2006's *Don Giovanni*, with graphic simulated sex and urination on stage, and the oppressively industrial atmosphere of *Wozzeck* in 2008 are frequently-cited examples of Bieito's extravagant, provocative work. Bieito's 1999 *Carmen*, however, might be considered relatively tame and restrained, in comparison to the profligacy of his later, more infamous productions; nevertheless, it is not a production entirely devoid of controversy. As with his other productions, *Carmen* contains Bieito's frequently recurring themes of sex, violence as money as motors of society and manifestations of power. These three themes compose the backbone of one of Bieito's most effective theatrical devices: *Verfremdungseffekt*. A Brechtian technique of audience alienation, *Verfremdungseffekt* functions in this instance as a way to encourage the audience to reconsider and re-evaluate both *Carmen* as a story and opera as an art form. In his operas Bieito implements elements of Brechtian staging, such as scarce use of props, a disengagement from the illusory emotional narrative of the characters, and an unfamiliar setting to encourage the audience to reflect more objectively on the action taking place on scene. In this production of *Carmen*, Bieito manifest this on stage by stripping back the baroque, romantic frills associated with more traditional productions, both in terms of scenery and in the minimising of Bizet's spoken dialogue. Similarly, the setting and scenery is ostentatiously modernised, with a minimal but referential set that allows Bieito to draw focus to the images that he portrays on stage.

This *Carmen* is removed from its 19th century origins and setting and brought up to the 1970s, and Bieito relocates the action to the Spanish exclave of Ceuta, thus undermining the traditional Andalucían iconography normally used metonymically to represent Spain, with repercussions both for local and international audiences. For a Spanish audience, Ceuta arguably evokes the physical isolation and permissiveness of

garrison towns and borderlands adjacent to Morocco, the former potentially a place dangerously outside customary Peninsular social norms. For an international audience, the change from romantic Andalucian (or 'Spanish') iconography to the distinctly utilitarian, underplayed set, is jarring and unfamiliar.

This 'background *Verfremdungseffekt*' is then complemented by an emphatic use of symbols provocative to a local audience: Bieito makes assumptions about the cultural background of the Liceu audience, and utilising these, makes use of a steady succession of carefully chosen, large-writ images, aiming to disconcert the viewer. As such, the most powerful tool of Bieito's *Verfremdung*, rather than the action on stage, is the scenery of the production.

Using similar scenery to the Peralada production, Bieito makes use of the larger stage at the Liceu to place the elements of the scenery far apart from each other, but despite the financial constraints, the larger budget and the greater space of the Liceu allowed for a more expansive production than at Peralada. The large scale of the few items of scenery creates a rather overwhelming effect of size; the larger space of the Liceu arguably allows for a greater epic quality, more visual impact, and emphasises the movement and energy of the action on stage, and underlines the importance of the few items of scenery that there are. For example, the phone box where Carmen starts her Habanera is placed at the far stage right, and there is a considerable distance between there and the large flagpole, complete with ominously large Spanish flag, in the centre of the stage (see Figure 4). The back of the stage was originally conceived to evoke the arches of a bullring, but this idea was dropped in favour of a plain semi-circular screen that allowed greater flexibility in the *mise en scène*, and enhanced the symbolism present in the opera. As if to compensate for the lack of actual bullring in the scenery, Bieito reinforces the bullfighting iconography in several ways; an overwhelmingly large

Osborne bull looms against a blood-red backdrop (see Figure 3), recalling the sun-baked melodrama of Bigas Luna's 1992 *Jamón Jamón*, and acting as an immediate metonym for "España", i.e. not Catalonia. In addition, a large chalk circle is drawn on the floor of the stage (which itself is extended out over the pit in a semi-circular fashion, see Figure 5), recalling the floor of a bullring, and in one of the more poetic and atmospheric moments of the production, a naked toreador practices his steps around the stage in the entr'acte before Act III (see Figure 5 below).

However, in up-sizing these potentially controversial symbols of 'Spain' (as opposed to Catalonia), Bieito simplifies and caricatures Spanish identity to play on the view of Spain created by Mérimée and subsequently propagated by Bizet's opera. Over the course of the production, the symbols of this 'foreign' identity are undermined and destroyed, as the bull comes crashing down and the Spanish flag is used as a rag (although in the Peralada production, perhaps due to a sense of security in the more 'Catalan' environment of the festival, the flag was trampled on). Rather than being a specifically pro-Catalan or anti-Spanish statement, it seems that Bieito is recognizing a seismic shift in the concept of 'Spanish identity': the idea Spain is 'una, grande y libre' to use the Francoist motto is shattered. Peripheral identities have emerged that consider themselves partially Spanish, but with a strong 'other' component, such as Galician, Basque, Catalan, or Andalucian. A united concept of Spain has been fragmented politically, linguistically and conceptually throughout the period of the Transition to democracy (1975-onwards).

As an ironic counterpoint to the politically-weighted large-scale symbols, in Act II, a Maneki Neko – or a golden 'welcoming cat' – is placed on the Mercedes; of Japanese origin, these kitschy trinkets are a foreign, but oddly-familiar sight in Chinese bazaars around the city.

The theme of violence permeates the production, but often through suggestion; Zúñiga is beaten up offstage, and the strong military presence is a constant reminder of this. The theme is also reflected in the reviews and their frequent use of the adjective 'violent', and Spanish/Catalan words like 'bronca'. Indeed, by opera standards, the production is violent, but from a televisual or cinematographic point of view there is little overt violence, all is suggestion. Nevertheless, in this production violence, either implicit or explicit, is an indispensable and omnipresent phenomenon. In Bieito's staging, it is the motivation behind the action and is accepted by the protagonists as a necessary part of the narrative reality of the circumstances.

In the same vein, the constant presence of the Spanish Legion is a manifestation of this violence, and the military aspect of the production is heavily emphasised in a much more sinister way than previously staged; rather than the tin-pot jolly singing soldiers of a more traditional production, this Carmen's soldiers are faceless, immoral sexual predators hiding behind the anonymity afforded by their Spanish Legion uniforms, seemingly untouchable in their Ceuta hideout. The soldiers represent the intersection between violence and sex: they lust after Carmen, surrounding her threateningly at the beginning of *La Habanera*, scaling the telephone box on stage in their pursuit of her (see Figure 6) and paying for sex wherever they can get it, as reflected in Carmen's companion Mercédès (Itxaro Mentxaka) performing oral sex on soldier Moralès (Àlex Sanmartí) during the *Chanson Bohème* in exchange for bundles of cash.

Nevertheless, Carmen and her companions manipulate the soldiers with their sexuality to get what they want. Indeed, Carmen herself is more pragmatic Almodóvar heroine than fetishised gypsy girl;



Figure 3. *Carmen's* flagpole looming over the Liceu © Antoni Bofill



Figure 4. The Osborne Bull in *Carmen* © Antoni Bofill

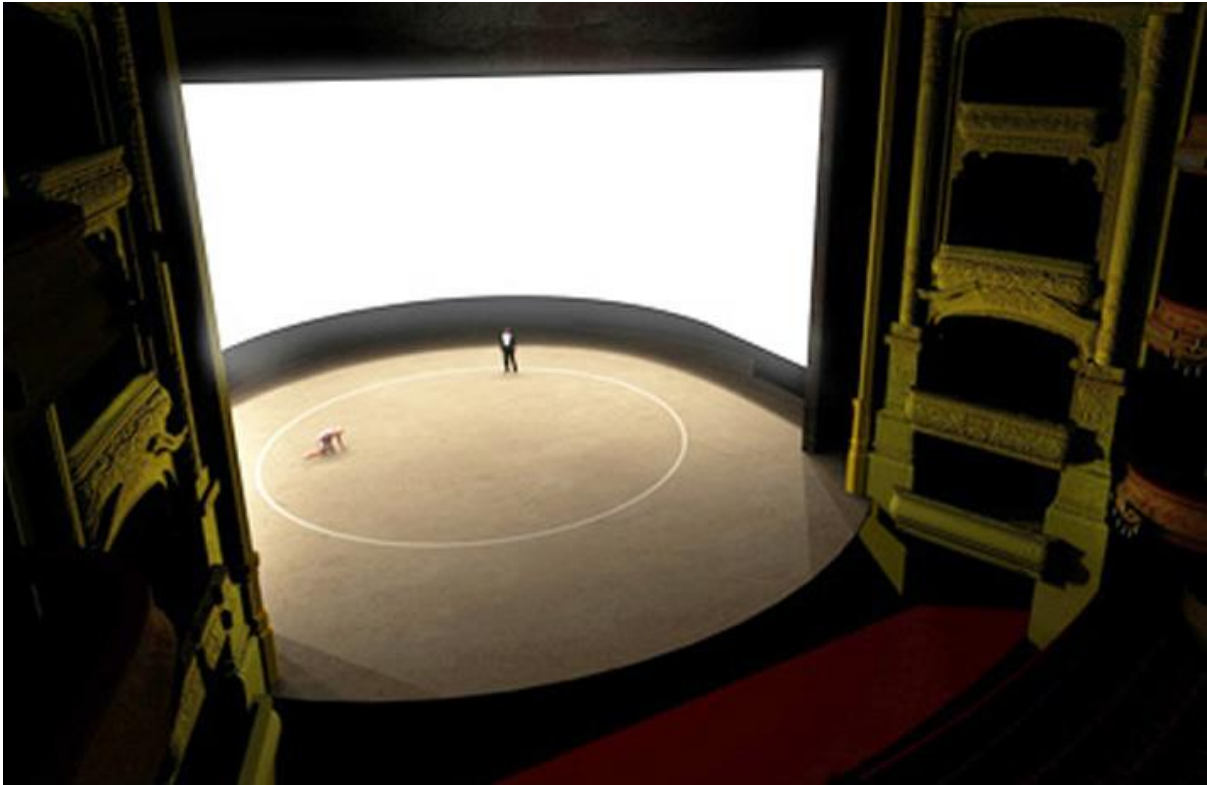


Figure 5. *Carmen's* bullfighting-inspired scenery © Gran Teatre del Liceu



Figure 6. Ainhoa Arteta as Carmen (B cast) during the *Habanera* © Antoni Bofill

her clothing is modern, she is well aware of her sexuality and uses both it in conjunction with her companions Frasquita and Mercedes to squeeze money out of the excitable Moralès and Zúñiga. Even if the women's goals are as crassly superficial as the attainment of money, it is a requirement of their circumstances. Bieito stresses, however, that rather than being romantically oversexualised as a gypsy erotic fantasy, he considers Carmen an ambitious figure:

I don't see her as a femme fatale with sex on her mind and legs wide open, but more a temperamental woman, the mistress of her own freedom.²⁸⁹

However, Bieito touches on a controversial conjunction of sex and coercion in the implicit meaning of officer Zúñiga's (Josep Ribot) worrying interaction with Mercédès's young daughter. Arguably a superfluous character, the figure served to represent a focus for the three themes of sex, violence and coercion that Bieito considers integral to the work. In addition to this rather modern touch, the production of Carmen is rendered especially relevant by the political and social circumstances of its timeframe. Although set in the 1970s, and despite the eleven years elapsed between Peralada and the Liceu productions, by means of his oversized symbols, Bieito evokes contemporary themes germane to Barcelona and Catalonia in general, as well as wider issues in society.

The looming Osborne bull and adoration of toreador Escamillo are arguably the manifest iconographies of a tradition that may be considered invalid in Catalonia, and would immediately connect the local spectator to the recent outlawing of bullfighting in

²⁸⁹ 'No la veo como una mujer fatal que va con el sexo en la boca y las piernas abiertas sino una mujer temperamental, dueña de su libertad'. Marta Cervera, 'Bieito regresa al Liceu con una Carmen cargada de pólvora'. *El Periódico de Catalunya*. 26 September 2010. p. 61.

Catalonia, effective from 2012; a high-profile piece of theatrical manoeuvring whose value lies in headlines rather than actions.

Carmen's very gypsy nature calls to mind the recent debates over the expulsion of the Roma from France, and closer to home, the debate sparked by Partido Popular representative for Badalona Xavier García-Albiol's comment that the situation of the gypsy populations of the suburban populations of La Mina, Sant Adrià de Besòs and Badalona was 'worse' than in France.²⁹⁰ Bieito's gypsies are certainly not romantic, and their presence here merely highlighted their status as outsiders within the parameters of society.

The near-omnipresent large Spanish flag hanging from a flagpole (see Figure 3) which takes up the vertical space of the stage, and makes an appearance several times throughout the production is perhaps the most controversial symbol of *Verfremdung*. For a local audience member, it is a clear reference to the tension between Spanish and Catalan identities, manifested in the social and political arena in the dozens of disputes between the central government and the Generalitat over a range of issues, from budgets, to schooling, healthcare and linguistic policy. The flag's symbolic power lies in the fact that it is likely to provoke a reaction in every viewer, from *centralistas* to *catalanistas*, and the resulting reaction became a common theme in the reviews.

With the Liceu audience in mind it would be hard to argue that Bieito's choice of symbols is not designed to provoke; a native of the small country town of Miranda de Ebro, he grew up in Barcelona, and is conscious of the potency of such images as the large Spanish flag and Osborne Bull, and of their effect on stage in the ostensibly Catalan-speaking milieu, like the Festival de Peralada in 1999 and notoriously vocal

²⁹⁰ Anon., 'Albiol ve peor los gitanos en Badalona que en Francia: "Aquí no están localizados"', *ABC*, 20 September 2010 <<http://www.abc.es/20100920/comunidad-catalunya/albiol-peor-gitanos-badalona-20100920.html>> [accessed 7 September 2011]

Liceu audience in 2010-11. That is not to say, of course, that the reaction will be universally negative, rather that there seems to be an assumption that the audience will be well aware of the complex response such manifest symbolism will cause.

The destruction of these symbols, then, takes on a more subtle meaning. Rather than representing a childish, inconsiderate anti-españolismo, it in fact encourages the audience, who may live a totally different reality of 'Spain', with a different understanding of borders, to question the acceptance of these externally-imposed images. Bieito seems to encourage the audience to reject the image of Carmen, her trappings and surroundings as canonically 'Spanish' in favour of a more contemporary manifestation of the story. This had resonance in the fact that this production was relayed to international cinemas in the UK and in Europe: Bieito's vision was Spain, but not Mérimée's Spain.

A constant in the reactions to the productions was the perceived maturity in the 2010 production and the reference point of Peralada, and even Bieito himself commented:

The setting has barely changed concept-wise. It's the same. But artistically it is different because in the Liceu everything is bigger, the lighting is more expressive, and there are more cars and they're all Mercedes.²⁹¹

Nevertheless, in the decade that has passed since Peralada, there is a sensation that there is a maturity to the production that was missing eleven years ago.²⁹² Many reviews noted that Roberto Alagna and Itxaro Mentxaka reprised their roles in both

²⁹¹ 'El montaje apenas ha cambiado de concepto. "Es igual. Pero plásticamente es distinto porque en Liceu todo es más grande, la luz es más expresionista y hay más coches y todos son Mercedes"', Marta Cervera, 'Bieito regresa al Liceu con una Carmen cargada de pólvora', *El Periódico de Catalunya*, 26th September 2010, p. 61.

²⁹² Ibid.

productions, giving a sense of continuity and evolution from the Peralada staging. In the words of Roberto Alagna:

‘The character [Don José] has changed because I’m more of a veteran, I have more life experience and I think that now Don José is more human. He is not afraid of Carmen, but he is afraid of her past, and in this sense he is a very sensitive character, and at some points even spiritual.’²⁹³

Interestingly, much was also made in the reviews of Béatrice Uría-Monzón (not insignificantly a French national with Spanish parents), the ‘experienced’ Carmen who figured in the A cast, who had interpreted the role over 300 times in her career, and claimed that ‘This is the Carmen I was waiting for, away from clichés, flamenco and other stereotypes’;²⁹⁴ notably, she had only played the role once before in Spain at the Teatro Real in Madrid. The maturity of the production was echoed in the headline in *La Vanguardia* on the 23rd of September, ‘Calixto Bieito gives the singers freedom in a more mature Carmen’ and in the same paper, Maricel Chavarría underlined that the time elapsed since Peralada and the context of Bieito’s later work had allowed a different reading of the production.²⁹⁵

As expected, the combination of Bieito, *Carmen*, and season opener at the Liceu generated a lot of column inches across the spectrum of the press, who were familiar with both the Peralada production and Bieito’s other works at the Liceu. As such, almost

²⁹³ ‘El personaje [Don José] ha cambiado porque yo soy más veterano, tengo más experiencia vital, y creo que ahora Don José es más humano. No tiene miedo de Carmen, pero tiene miedo de su pasado, y en ese sentido es un personaje muy sensible y en algunos momentos más espiritual’ EFE, ‘Calixto Bieito deja libertad a los cantantes en una "Carmen" más madura’, *La Vanguardia*, 23 September 2010 <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/cultura/noticias/20100923/54010463272/calixto-bieito-deja-libertad-a-los-cantantes-en-una-carmen-mas-madura-peralada-monzon-barcelona-anda.html>> [accessed 27th September 2010]

²⁹⁴ ‘Ésta es la Carmen que [yo] esperaba, fuera de los clichés, del flamenco y de otros estereotipos’, *Ibid.*

²⁹⁵ Maricel Chavarría, ‘Una “Carmen” a flor de piel’, *La Vanguardia*, 28 September 2010 <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/cultura/noticias/20100928/54013704705/una-carmen-a-flor-de-piel-bieito-liceu-calixto-bieito-maria-bayo-bayreuth-joan-manuel-tresserras-jos.html>> [accessed 15 October 2010]

every review of the production drew attention to Bieito's directorial reputation, and used a suitably forceful vocabulary when describing Bieito's creative output in the various opinion pages of the culture sections of the main newspapers. Reviewers heavily emphasise their assessment of Bieito's staging, largely considering the visual, kinetic aspect of the production, while verdicts on the musical and vocal aspects tended to be brief. Indeed, during my time at the rehearsals there, there was very little musical direction from the stage; conductor Marc Piollet was entirely in charge of the musical side of the opera, while the stage direction was purely Bieito's domain, emphasising the precedence Bieito appears to give to spectacle over music, suggesting that the director expected the musical aspect to be in place before the stage direction began, and this is reflected in the reviews, who noted the skilful direction of the actors and the effective use of the choir. *ABC* contrasted the overall harshness of the visual aspect of the production with the subtle musical direction of Marc Piollet and the delicate lyricism of some of the images presented – the naked toreador, for example – and with the exception of Roberto Alagna, reserved their praise for the second cast.²⁹⁶

Roberto Alagna was practically universally praised for both his musical and acting achievements, as well as being a barometer of the evolution of the production from Peralada, and Marc Piollet was lauded by both *La Vanguardia*²⁹⁷ and *ABC*²⁹⁸ for lightness of touch. However, with the exception of María Bayo, the other vocalists were given a lukewarm reception; for all her experience in the role, Béatrice Uría-Monzón's

²⁹⁶ Pablo Menéndez-Haddad, 'La violenta "Carmen" de Calixto Bieito', *ABC*, 29 September 2010 <<http://www.abc.es/20100929/cultura-musica/carmen-liceu-201009291815.html>> [accessed 27 November 2010]

²⁹⁷ Maricel Chavarría, 'Una "Carmen" a flor de piel', *La Vanguardia*, 28 September 2010 <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/cultura/noticias/20100928/54013704705/una-carmen-a-flor-de-piel-bieito-liceu-calixto-bieito-maria-bayo-bayreuth-joan-manuel-tresserras-jos.html>> [accessed 15 October 2010]

²⁹⁸ Pablo Menéndez-Haddad, 'La violenta "Carmen" de Calixto Bieito', *ABC*, 29 September 2010 <<http://www.abc.es/20100929/cultura-musica/carmen-liceu-201009291815.html>> [accessed 27 November 2010]

Carmen was considered vocally inadequate for the production, with several papers noting the lack of the usual audience enthusiasm for 'la Chanson Bohème'.²⁹⁹ Nevertheless, Uría-Monzón's confidence in the role led to praise for her stage presence. Some reviewers, however, such as *Time Out's* Javier Sánchez Pérez noted that in with playing with Mérimée's and Bizet's clichés, Bieito's Carmen fell into clichés of modern film-making, and noted that the incessantly vulgar atmosphere of cars, bras, and booze, and noted that Carmen, Frasquita and Mercédès's quest for money and sex recalled the artificial, forced atmosphere of a Quentin Tarantino movie.³⁰⁰ For all the inconsistency of the forceful images writ by Bieito, *ABC's* Pablo Menéndez-Haddad noted that the production 'gets into the very essence of the work' echoing the common opinion that the modernity of this Carmen made the 19th century story as relevant as ever in its portrayal of themes of misery and unhappiness.³⁰¹ Regardless of the spectrum of opinions that Bieito's *Carmen* has provoked, it is clear that the power of the imagery of the production overshadows the musical quality of the piece. It seems that the abstract strength of the *mise-en-scène* led reviewers to evaluate the opera more in non-musical theatre terms; the strength of each cast member's acting skill seemed to be far more of a consideration than their musical ability.

In addition, a typical bent of the reviews of *Carmen* frequently contrasted the comparatively mild 'controversy' of the current *Carmen* to other, more hardcore Bieito productions, alluding to a possible 'mellowing' of the director, as though Carmen has closed a ten-year cycle of adolescent bad behaviour. This 'mellowing' has been

²⁹⁹ Both Pablo Menéndez-Haddad and Fernando Sans Rivière noted Uría-Monzón's vocal inadequacy – Fernando Sans Rivière, 'El mejor Bieito', *La Razón*, 29 September 2010 <<http://www.larazon.es/noticia/5029-el-mejor-bieito>> [accessed 15 October 2010]

³⁰⁰ Javier Sánchez Pérez, 'Carmen', *Time Out Barcelona*, 136 (30th September – 6th October 2010), p. 65.

³⁰¹ 'Se mete en la esencia misma de la obra', Pablo Menéndez-Haddad, 'La violenta "Carmen" de Calixto Bieito', *ABC*, 29 September 2010. <<http://www.abc.es/20100929/cultura-musica/carmen-liceu-201009291815.html>> [accessed 27 November 2010]

welcomed in the right-wing national press: for example, *La Razón* called the 2010 Carmen ‘the best Bieito’³⁰² and *ABC* gives it a largely positive review, appreciating the ‘maturity’ of the work in its evolution since Peralada,³⁰³ lauding the production’s coherence and lyrical and visual strength. This right-wing ‘approval’ is perhaps representative in some measure of the process Bieito’s work has undergone; from the shock tactics of *Un ballo in maschera* and *Don Giovanni* one knows to expect radical reinterpretation from his work. Bieito’s radicalism was counterweighted in many reviews by a mention of the supposed conservatism of the Liceu audience, nevertheless there seems to be little consensus on whether the bravos or the boos overruled each other. *La Vanguardia* suggests that the initial boos of the shock of the production were outweighed by the bravos at the end of the production,³⁰⁴ and Catalan-language newspaper *El Punt* noted that ‘At the end, the usual booing at Bieito’s premieres was moderate, but in eleven years the director has done better things.’³⁰⁵

More and more, the reviews dismissed the habitual controversy that seems now a pre-requisite for Bieito productions as a sign of an established audience who never fail to rise to the provocations placed before them. The squalid grandeur and toilet scenes of *Un ballo in maschera* and the disconcerting urination of *Wozzeck* certainly have their shock value, but these are productions, as of 2011 that are no longer ‘new’: (*Un ballo in*

³⁰² Fernando Sans Rivière, ‘El mejor Bieito’, *La Razón*, 29 September 2010.

<<http://www.larazon.es/noticia/5029-el-mejor-bieito>> [accessed 15 October 2010]

³⁰³ Pablo Menéndez-Haddad, ‘Un Calixto Bieito “maduro” regresa al Liceu con “Carmen”’, *ABC*, 24 September 2010. <<http://www.abc.es/20100924/cultura/calixto-bieito-maduro-regresa-20100924.html>> [accessed 7 December 2010]

³⁰⁴ Maricel Chavarría, ‘Una “Carmen” a flor de piel’, *La Vanguardia*, 28 September 2010 <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/cultura/noticias/20100928/54013704705/una-carmen-a-flor-de-piel-bieito-liceu-calixto-bieito-maria-bayo-bayreuth-joan-manuel-tresserras-jos.html>> [accessed 15 October 2010]

³⁰⁵ ‘Al final, l’escridassada habitual en les estrenes de Bieito va ser moderada, però en onze anys el director ha fet coses millors’, Xavier Cester, ‘El pas del temps’, *El Punt Avui*, 29 September 2010, p. 18.

maschera was premiered at the Liceu during the 2000-2001 season, and Bieito's *Wozzeck* dates from 2008. And if opera is an acquired taste then Bieito's reputation, being what it is, should prove no great mental leap. This suggests that those who boo Bieito's productions go for the morbid fascination of seeing the florid, baroque production of yesteryear despoiled in a (relatively) savage, post-modern way, or that they are either in some way theatrically infantile and cannot accept his highly visual, rather than musical concept. In either case, the polemic production often served to provoke the (re)viewer into nailing their colours to the stand.

For example, *Avui's* Montserrat Guardiet's reaction to the imagery of *Carmen* is of one of betrayal, she manifests her apparent discomfort at the blatancy of supposed (Catalan) compatriot Bieito's symbolism. As such, her review is an illustration of the immature reactions and the victimism that Bieito is out to challenge; the reviewer has failed to see past the admittedly provocative symbolism to the content underneath. Fortunately, Guardiet's colleagues were able to see beyond the provocations; Imma Merino hit the mark with her comment that the production is 'intentionally naff,³⁰⁶ and Xavier Cester consider the polemic surrounding the production indicative of a society in which there is little real consensus or negotiation and opinions are either black or white; one must either wildly applaud Bieito and bathe in his reflected international glory or plead for his excessively choreographed, pornographic shows to leave august institutions like the Liceu well alone.³⁰⁷ As such, articles like 'Vol dir que calia, Sr. Bieito' (Was that really necessary?) by Cester's colleague Montserrat Guardiet are manifestations of childish disappointment.³⁰⁸ Guardiet denounces Bieito's provocative

³⁰⁶ 'Intencionadament cutre', Imma Merino, 'Una víctima de la violència de gènere' *El Punt Avui*, 4th October 2010, p. 37.

³⁰⁷ Xavier Cester, 'Bieito com a paradigma', *El Punt Avui*, 26 October 2010, p. 45.

³⁰⁸ Montserrat Guardiet, 'Vol dir que calia, Sr. Bieito?', *El Punt Avui*, 18 October 2010, p. 20.

imagery as anti-Catalan, and expresses disappointment at this behaviour from someone who has been welcomed into (or appropriated by) the Catalan establishment, betraying a helplessly short-sighted and potentially harmful concept of what culture in Catalonia is, who produces 'Catalan' culture and a worrying intolerance of cultural discussion (and dissent).

Despite this, Bieito is still considered a successful Catalan director; given the attendance of 'society figures' at the *Carmen* premiere, such as then-President of the Generalitat José Montilla, Joan Manuel Tresserras, Jordi Hereu, Artur Mas, Maruja Torres, and Xavier Albertí,³⁰⁹ attending Bieito's work seems to have become something of a society event, perhaps indicating a certain 'welcoming into the fold', or indeed, institutionalisation both in Spain and abroad. Upon winning the 2009 European Culture Prize from Pro Europa, Bieito commented to *El País* 'I don't need it, but it gives me a very pleasant feeling',³¹⁰ revealing Bieito's own ambiguous feelings towards being brought into the institution of theatre in Barcelona and Spain in general. Given this reaction to the prize, and at the conclusion of his 10-year stint as artistic director of the Romea to be replaced by Julio Manrique, this production of *Carmen* could arguably be seen as Bieito's swansong in Barcelona. When he left for his next production of *Parsifal* 'a su manera' at the Bayerische Staatsoper in Munich in December 2010, Bieito left behind mixed opinions about his legacy to Barcelona, both in terms of his collaboration with the Liceu and his greater oeuvre.

³⁰⁹ C. López Rosell, 'La "Carmen" de Bieito agita el Liceu', *El Periódico de Catalunya*, 28 September 2010 <<http://www.elperiodico.com/es/noticias/cultura-y-espectaculos/20100928/carmen-bieito-agita-liceu/503186.shtml>> [accessed 7 November 2010]

³¹⁰ 'No [lo] necesito, pero que me produce una sensación muy agradable', Lourdes Morgades, 'Calixto Bieito, Premio de Cultura Europeo 2009', *El País*, 28 July 2009 <http://www.elpais.com/articulo/cultura/Calixto/Bieito/Premio/Cultura/Europeo/2009/elpepucul/20090728elpepucul_4/Tes> [accessed 8 November 2010]

It is worth briefly mentioning the British reaction to the *Carmen* that appeared at the English National Opera with a different cast on the 22nd November 2012: called ‘a tacky, tawdry travesty of a Carmen’ by the *Daily Mail*,³¹¹ the production was criticised by the *Telegraph* for the poor singing by the leads and lack of meaningful scenery, rather than any of the ‘orgiastic obscenity’ usually associated with Bieito’s work.³¹² The *Observer*’s review was more comprehensive and much more positive; reviewer Fiona Maddocks considered the acting skills of the singers, albeit noting the deficiencies of their performance, the work of the orchestra and the value of the pared-down scenery, and qualified the work as ‘intelligent, persuasive and intense’:³¹³ the three reviews bear the hallmarks of their newspapers’ affiliation, and so it is perhaps predictable that the *Guardian* would view Bieito’s work favourably, while the *Daily Mail* and *The Telegraph* would take greater offense at the director’s re-envisioning of the classic opera. The UK reviews also demonstrate the ways in which brand Bieito – which the Liceu played a decisive role in shaping – is seen outside of Barcelona.

To close, despite the evident, and perhaps even clichéd controversy that a Bieito production provokes, this 2010 *Carmen* is perhaps one of his best works; in its striking and intelligently provocative aesthetic it serves Bieito’s mantra of opera as a social and educational medium. While the artistic concept may not be to everyone’s taste, this is undoubtedly an opera that engages with relevant cultural and political issues in a Barcelona context.

³¹¹ David Gillard, ‘A tawdry travesty of a Carmen from the Tarantino of Opera’, *Daily Mail*, 22 November 2012 <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/reviews/article-2237130/Carmen-London-Coliseum-review-A-tawdry-travesty-Calixto-Bieito.html>> [accessed 8 August 2013]

³¹² Rupert Christiansen, ‘Carmen, English National Opera, London Coliseum, review’, the *Telegraph*, 22 November 2012 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/opera/9695728/Carmen-English-National-Opera-London-Coliseum-review.html>> [accessed 8 August 2013]

³¹³ Fiona Maddocks, ‘Carmen: the Manson Ensemble; the Nash Ensemble – review’, *The Guardian*, 25 November 2012 <<http://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/nov/25/carmen-eno-review-manson-ensemble>> [accessed 8 August 2013]

LA FURA DELS BAUS: CONTAMINATED BODIES AND *LE GRAND MACABRE* (2011)

From the 1980s onwards, the application of novel concepts such as video projection and advances in stage technology dramatically altered the previous modus operandi of opera productions, with collaboration from external artists of differing disciplines to explore and expand opera's visual and dramatic potential.³¹⁴ This in turn allowed the introduction of startlingly non-traditional visuals into opera productions, redressing the precedence of the musical over the visual to create impressive visual metanarratives and alternative reinterpretations. Since their inception in 1979, La Fura dels Baus has successfully embraced this technology to and create theatre beyond the proscenium arch; their early street performances in Sitges brought theatre to the street in a way not seen previously in Spain. Their trajectory has brought them international renown and they have now become part of the Catalan cultural establishment and a successful brand and export.

Key to their bold visual aesthetic are the themes of interdisciplinarity, 'total performance', Gesamtkunstwerk and spectator participation in their productions, themes that are expressed both in their theatre work and in their macroproductions like *Mar Mediterrània* (1992), which opened the Barcelona Olympics, and *La divina commedia* (2002). Given their penchant for creating large-scale, interdisciplinary shows, the aesthetic and dramatic potential of opera invites the kind of extensive visual and narrative reworkings La Fura undertakes. As such, La Fura often collaborates with an extensive list of contemporary Spanish/Catalan artists; to mention some examples in opera alone, sculptor Jaume Plensa created the wardrobe and set for *L'Atlàntida* (1996)

³¹⁴ Mercè Saumell (translated by Simon Breden, Maria M. Delgado and Lourdes Orozco), 'La Fura dels Baus: Scenes for the twenty-first century', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 17,3 (2005), 335 - 345, p. 341.

and *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* (1997) amongst others, and Enric Miralles and Benedetta Tagliabue's architecture studio was commissioned to create a large, skeletal zeppelin that appeared on the Liceu stage for *D.Q. Don Quijote en Barcelona* in 2000. La Fura's employment of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, inasmuch as it uses modern incarnations of architecture, art, opera, and music to create highly visual metaphors that embrace sculptural and architectonic forms, frequently enhancing the protagonism of the scenery and costume as an essential part of the production, rather than mere *atrezzo*.

La Fura's first foray into the world of opera came in 1996 with their production of Manuel de Falla's *L'Atlàntida*, based on Jacint Verdaguer's 1877 epic novel; theirs was a staging that made use of video projections to immerse the audience into the submarine world of Atlantis in front of Granada cathedral. The work had had a chequered history of production; unfinished on de Falla's death, Ernesto Halffter was commissioned to complete it; although premiered in 1961, Halffter did not consider the work complete until a production at the Festival de Lucerne in 1976.³¹⁵ A symbolist work that combines oratorio, themes of discovery of America, the decadence of Europe, La Fura took advantage of *L'Atlàntida*'s multifaceted nature and created a complementary metanarrative that told the story of the work itself, with Verdaguer, de Falla and the architect Josep Lluís Sert (who had collaborated with Falla on the scenery, although neither saw the work produced in their lifetimes) as spectators of the process of creation.

Following this, La Fura's production of the Debussy opera for d'Annunzio's *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien* in 1997 provided the challenge of constructing a production around an opera with no clear linear narrative structure or indeed central protagonist.

³¹⁵ La Fura dels Baus, Explanatory text for *L'Atlàntida*, <http://www.lafura.com/web/eng/obras_ficha.php?o=64> [accessed 28 October 2011]

Le martyre de Saint Sébastien is described as a 'symbolic musical mystery'.³¹⁶ As such, La Fura created a supporting dramaturgy that functioned as a framework in which to manifest d'Annunzio's complex symbolist imagery, with the creation of a doctor who, both figuratively and physically, dissects Sebastian and acts as narrator and audience surrogate.

La Fura's third part of their operatic trajectory was Berlioz's *La damnation de Faust* in 1999, and was perhaps the production that opened up their opera productions to international exposure at the Salzburg festival. Like *L'Atlantida* and *Le Martyre de Saint Sébastien*, *La damnation de Faust* is an unconventional opera with no clear narrative structure. Once again, this narrative flexibility allows La Fura to create a metanarrative to reinterpret a work that allows for a wide range of expressive possibilities and reinterpretation.

Just as the scenery and costumes are carefully chosen, the locations of La Fura's operatic productions are not incidental; they are architectural details intrinsic to the production. Granada was Manuel de Falla's home from the early 1920s until his exile at the end of the Spanish Civil War; *La damnation de Faust* was held at the Felsenreitschule in Salzburg; an ex-riding school converted into a theatre with a 40-metre-long stage hewn out of the rock, ideal for Jaume Plensa's large horizontal scenery. Indeed, the architectural referent for *D.Q. Don Quijote en Barcelona* was La Rambla, and the fact of the staging in the Liceu became took on an extra dimension of specificity given the location inherent in the name *Don Quijote en Barcelona*.

It is symbolic both of La Fura's (inter)national success and of the Liceu's desire to include non-traditional works in its repertoire that they should have collaborated on

³¹⁶ La Fura dels Baus, Explanatory text for *El martiri de Sant Sebastià*, <http://www.lafura.com/web/eng/obras_ficha.php?o=65> [accessed 28 October 2011]

the creation of a house opera soon after the reinauguration of the Liceu in 1999 with La Fura's production of *Don Quijote en Barcelona*; La Fura's trajectory has always included collaboration between various kinds of artist and art forms, but this was one of their first to include opera as a natural partner to their performance-based work. Bringing together composer José Luis Turina, writer and journalist Justo Navarro, and, as previously mentioned, the architects Enric Miralles and Benedetta Tagliabue, the production of *D.Q.* was specially commissioned to take advantage of the Liceu's cutting-edge stage technology, implemented during the reconstruction of the theatre from 1994 to 1999.

Having cut their teeth on a selection of non-traditional, non-linear operas, it comes as little surprise that La Fura wanted to create their own opera, representing their commitment to the renovation of opera as an art form through new technologies, as highlighted by Carlos Padrissa's comment that the computer is 'un nuevo artista renacentista':³¹⁷ multidisciplinary and radical.

Given the sequence of operatic productions undertaken by La Fura, the choice of György Ligeti's anti-opera *Le Grand Macabre* (first premiered in 1978 in Stockholm) is perhaps a natural choice. Ligeti's opera is a highly physical, scatological work; the language is profane, obscene and radical, with traits of Antonin Artaud's total theatre of cruelty.³¹⁸ Based on the work of Belgian surrealist writer Michel de Ghelderode *La Balade du Grand Macabre*, Ligeti was inspired to turn de Ghelderode's story into a libretto after seeing Mauricio Kagel's 1967 anti-opera *Staatstheater*, a work Ligeti considered the definitive anti-opera. In Kagel's piece, operatic convention was forcibly

³¹⁷ Mercè Saumell (translated by Simon Breden, Maria M. Delgado and Lourdes Orozco), 'La Fura dels Baus: Scenes for the twenty-first century', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 17, 3 (2005), 335 - 345, p. 341.

³¹⁸ 1978 interview with Gyorgy Ligeti by Herman Sabbe, *Interface*, (8, 1979), 11-34. <<http://www.ronsen.org/monkminkpinkpunk/9/gl3.html>> [accessed 3 November 2011]

reversed; for example, the singers sang in chorus, the chorus sang solo, the dancers do not dance, but those who cannot dance, do. Having seen opera ironised and undermined by Kagel in his use of non-dancing ballet dancers and chamberpots and enema equipment in the orchestra, Ligeti proposed to create an anti-anti-opera, thus ironically incorporating both operatic and anti-operatic traditions into a work Ligeti himself considered not opera, but theatre 'with music as an integral part'.³¹⁹ It seems that Ligeti wanted to avail himself of the possibilities an opera house presented in terms of technical capabilities, and desired to retain the sense of occasion and tradition of a proscenium arch production, all the while creating a production that defied the conventions of the genre. Taking de Ghelderode's inspiration from the Brueghel painting, *The Triumph of Death*, Ligeti sought to create an entirely artificial, anti-naturalistic opera, defying conventions of motifs and cohesion of aesthetic and moral content. Indeed Ligeti himself noted that the work is bereft of moral, and should be enjoyed on a purely aesthetic basis.³²⁰ *Le Grand Macabre* then represents an intersection between various concepts; as a 'free-form' opera with little narrative that, despite its defined parameters, allows for a great freedom of expression, and in the case of *La Fura*, allows for a visual metanarrative that works within a proscenium arch. The aesthetic of the production (which was a collaboration between La Monnaie in Brussels – where the work was premiered – English National Opera and L'Opera di Roma) is centred on malaise, illness, decadence and death. As the production starts, the audience is treated to a symphony of car horns operated by three percussionists. This kind of aural assault gives something of an idea of the musical content that Ligeti put together for the opera. The figure of Claudia, a naked woman that forms the centrepiece of the scenery,

³¹⁹ 1974 interview with Gyorgy Ligeti by Adrian Jack, *Music and Musicians*, 263, (22, 1974) <<http://www.ronsen.org/monkminkpinkpunk/9/gl2.html>> [accessed 3 November 2011]

³²⁰ Ibid.

obese and ill, crouched obscenely on the stage recalls the grotesque in works of Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Brueghel (who gives name to the setting, the hideous Brueghelland).



Figure 7. *Le Grand Macabre's* Claudia © Antoni Bofill

Video artist Franc Aleu's projections of a woman gorging on fast food and smoking allude to the poor state of Claudia's health, while her expression of terror points to an overarching fear of decay and mortality, personified in the figure of Death that acts as the work's protagonist, Nekrotzar. Claudia is arguably representative of the immediate corporeal energy of the performance body and the rejection of the anti-septic, disease-free image of contemporary society; she is the embodiment of mortality, and while moribund, is a reminder of fleeting vitality, something that even Death is not exempt from in *Le Grand Macabre*. Through the reappropriation of Claudia's orifices La Fura

rejects the denaturalisation of body fluids and orifices, giving the latter a crucial role as physical entrances and exits through which the actors and singers appear, used to humorous effect with the entrance of the Black and White Ministers who emerge from Claudia's back end to undertake an alphabetical slanging match. This particular section was done in English using actors that had appeared in the English National Opera production in September 2009.

In tune with various other La Fura productions like *XXX* (2001) and *Carmina Burana* (2009), there is a fluidity and vagueness of identity in *Le Grand Macabre* that borders on parody and ridicules conventional binaries; the lovers Amando and Amanda (also known by their more X-rated monikers Spermando and Clitoria), who frequently engage in ecstatic sexual behaviour are played by two women, although they portray a heterosexual couple. The sexually ambiguous tyrant Prince Go-Go is played by a countertenor that, in the La Fura production, is poured into a gold lurex costume, and Gepopo, the sinister head of the secret service is portrayed by a coloratura soprano in an angular, sharp costume that evokes Jean-Paul Gaultier's outlandish creations for actress Victoria Abril in Almodóvar's 1989 film *Kika*.

The critical reception for the La Fura production has largely been positive. As might be expected, the vast majority of the reviews' content was concentrated on the visual aspect of the production, with the musical components of the opera being reduced to mere footnotes. However, the notorious difficulty, sheer inventiveness and breadth of the score arguably stands up on its own, a match to any staging.



Figure 8. The Black and White Ministers make their entrance © Gran Teatre del Liceu

Agustí Fancelli's review overflows with praise for the production, from the inventive use of Claudia's entrances and exits and her internal disco (complete with mirrorball) and the Franc Aleu's precise video projection to the sense of humour that Fancelli deems indispensable for the work.³²¹ In Fancelli's final comment 'it's rare that everything should come together so well'³²² it is clear that La Fura have attained an ideal of *Gesamtkunstwerk* that Ligeti himself appears to have been attempting to collate: in a sense, *Le Grand Macabre* is an homage to many opera composers' work, from Beethoven (in Ligeti's use of his *Eroica* symphony) to Berg, Rossini, Wagner and Stravinski, with each composer being dedicated a musical section. Nevertheless, the

³²¹ Agustí Fancelli, 'Grande, "Gran Macabro"', *El País*, 23 November 2011 <http://sociedad.elpais.com/sociedad/2011/11/23/actualidad/1322002808_850215.html> [accessed 8 August 2013]

³²² 'Es raro que todo cuadre tan bien', *ibid.*

entire production takes place within a theatrical framework that nods to Brecht and *Ubu the King* by Jarry.³²³

One minor criticism of the work was the lack of expression of Ligeti's ambiguity of death and life in the La Fura production. For an opera whose protagonist is effectively Death, there is little room in the production for the exploration of this theme. The ambivalent attitude towards this is manifested in the incapacitation, humanisation or obviation of Death through the inevitable toxin of alcohol and the resultant celebration of life in the final piece 'Fear not to die, good people all. No-one knows when his hour will fall. Farewell in cheerfulness, farewell!' is overshadowed by the insistent decay suggested by Claudia. A further criticism was the changes made to the libretto in 1996 by Ligeti himself, who set parts of previously spoken dialogue to music, arguably nudging the production towards more traditional operatic conventions. Edward Seckerson of the *Telegraph* notes that in the 1980s, Ligeti's work was an 'exceedingly smelly fart in the general direction of Opera',³²⁴ and the scatological theme was repeated in the title of *Mundo Clásico's* review: 'Por el culo' (Up the arse).³²⁵ Nevertheless, both the opera and its production were problematised in the reviews as being one-time-only shock value; the joyously scatological and visceral nature of the opera, like all toilet humour was only briefly thrilling and radical. Commenting on the London production for the English National Opera, critic Andrew Clements noted the 'dazzling effects' of La Fura's visuals:

³²³ Agustí Fancelli, 'Grande, "Gran Macabro"', *El País*, 23 November 2011 <http://sociedad.elpais.com/sociedad/2011/11/23/actualidad/1322002808_850215.html> [accessed 8 August 2013]

³²⁴ Edward Seckerson, 'Le Grand Macabre', *The Independent*, 18 September 2009 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/classical/reviews/ligeti-le-grand-macabre-english-national-opera-london-coliseum-london-1789582.html>> [accessed 15 November 2011]

³²⁵ Agustín Blanco Bazán, 'Por el culo', *Mundo Clásico*, 2 October 2009. <<http://www.mundoclasico.com/ed/documentos/doc-ver.aspx?id=a26cd1ab-1d4d-4c65-ba55-929b7bd6d92d>> [accessed 15 November 2011]



Figure 9. La Fura dels Baus's 'Claudia' © El Periódico de Catalunya

projected on the figure of the naked Claudia, yet noted that frequent La Fura collaborator Franc Aleu's video projections lacked a needed specificity to the production.³²⁶

Nevertheless, this is the opera's première in Spain and the production could be seen as La Fura's 'coming home' to Barcelona, and more specifically, the Liceu could be considered the natural home for this intersection of La Fura dels Baus and a staunchly non-traditional opera. Matabosch himself called the production at the Liceu:

An event of prime importance [...] this is the Spanish première of one of the most unique and important operas of the 20th century. A work that all the great theatres are incorporating into their repertoire as an

³²⁶ Andrew Clements, 'Le Grand Macabre', *The Guardian*, 18 September 2009
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2009/sep/18/le-grand-macabre-coliseum-review>>
[accessed 15 November 2011]

essential piece, and one that no Spanish theatre had premièred until now.³²⁷

Given this combination of première, La Fura and the Liceu, it is perhaps to be expected that there was a tone of pride in many reviews, with *La Vanguardia* lamenting that it had taken so long for the production to have arrived in Barcelona, and revelling in the home-grown talent exhibited on stage; Alex Ollé and Valentina Carrasco's direction, Alfons Flores's scenery, Frank Aleu's video work and Lluç Castells's wardrobe won lashings of praise,³²⁸ as did the largely international cast, whose experience in previous stagings translated into a confident and precise production, arguably the definitive production for the opera.

The timing of the première did not go unnoticed in the majority of the reviews; although one could not have foreseen this at the planning stage, but the first night fell on the 'jornada de reflexión' (day of reflection) before the 20th November 2011 general election; *La Vanguardia's* Maricel Chavarria noted that the date demands 'a certain solemnity and not a macabre parody of death',³²⁹ given that the date was also significant as it was the date of Franco's death. Given the work's ironic celebration of life, it may have been an appropriate date before such a foregone conclusion (of the massive desertion of the Socialist Party and the victory of the conservative Popular Party) in

³²⁷ 'Un esdeveniment de primeríssima magnitud [...] És l'estrena a Espanya d'una de les òperes més importants i més singulars del segle XX. Una obra que tots els grans teatres estan incorporant al seu repertori com a títol imprescindible i que cap teatre espanyol havia estrenat fins ara.' Marta Salicrú "'Le Grand Macabre"' és una de les obres més importants en la trajectòria de La Fura', *Ara*, 16 November 2011 <http://www.ara.cat/cultura/Le-Grand-Macabre-important-trajectoria-Fura-Baus_0_592140950.html> [accessed 28 August 2013]

³²⁸ See the aforementioned reviews by Agustín Blanco Bazán, Andrew Clements, Agustí Fancelli, Edward Seckerson and Lourdes Morgades 'La Fura dels Baus desafia a "El gran macabro"', *El País*, 23 March 2009 <http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2009/03/23/actualidad/1237762809_850215.html> [accessed 8 August 2013]

³²⁹ 'Cierta solemnidad y no una macabra parodia de la muerte', Maricel Chavarria, 'La Fura cautiva con "Le Grand Macabre"', *La Vanguardia*, 20 November 2011, p. 48 <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/cultura/20111120/54239114015/la-fura-cautiva-estreno-grand-macabre-ligeti.html>> [accessed 28 August 2013]

political terms. Indeed, given the almost inevitable political result, the grotesque tone of the production seemed to sit well with the audience, as if Claudia's moribund form were presaging the future, the slow death of the county, and Ligeti were calling the audience to laugh in order to be able to face the impending troubles. Similarly in *ABC*, Joan Carles Valero compared Europe's financial problems with the production, drawing comparisons with Claudia and Germany as the focus of the 'show', but in the Liceu and on the European political stage.³³⁰

A relative dearth of prominent political figures was noted at the première by the newspapers, with the exception of Generalitat culture minister Ferran Mascarell, surprising given the prestige that might be associated with a La Fura and Liceu co-production. Many reviews mentioned the typical first night boos at the premiere, but suggested that they are less and less representative of the production's public reception; as with the boos that followed last year's *Carmen*, it is almost a given that they will make an token appearance and are to be taken with a pinch of salt. Critic Miquel Molina notes that with the exception of what he called 'a human vuvuzela' next to him, there were barely any dissenting voices at the première, rather that the atmosphere was one of a last hurrah that was to be enjoyed before the impending political and economic conservatism.³³¹ In fact, opera critic and Liceu historian Roger Alier qualified the production as a 'historic milestone' in the Liceu's history.³³²

Within the wider context of the difficulties faced by cultural institutions, Molina suggests, however, that the current financial problems affecting theatres all over Europe

³³⁰ Joan Carles Valero, 'Ahuyentar al gran Macabro', *ABC*, 28 November 2011 <<http://www.abc.es/20111128/local-cataluna/abci-ahuyentar-gran-macabro-201111280959.html>> [accessed 8 August 2013]

³³¹ Miquel Molina, 'El Macabro y el diferencial con el bono alemán', *La Vanguardia*, 19 November 2011. <<http://www.lavanguardia.com/opinion/articulos/20111119/54239115735/el-macabro-y-el-diferencial-con-el-bono-aleman.html>> [accessed 14 February 2012].

³³² Roger Alier, 'Més gran que "macabre"', *La Vanguardia*, 21 November 2011, p. 62.

is bad news; arguing that an increasingly Americanised model of private funding endangers the theatres' freedom of expression as security of funding becomes more important than artistic innovation. To borrow his example, a well-staged *Trovatore* is a much less risky bet than something as contemporary and openly anti-tradition as this staging of an already unusual opera. Radical productions have become something of a staple at the Liceu under Joan Matabosch, whose commitment to the renovation of opera as a contemporary art form has seen frequent collaboration with the radical visions of David McVicar and Stefan Herheim, as well as Calixto Bieito and La Fura, and if Molina's prediction becomes reality, this imposed conservatism will sit ill with the Liceu's artistic direction. Given the uncertain future (or rather, the certain reduction of funding from the public purse) faced by the Liceu, *liceístas* may remember the radical opening productions like Bieito's *Carmen* and Gilberto Delfo's *Il Trovatore* (set in a bare, war-like background that recalled the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq) of previous years and the expressive freedom they connote with a certain amount of longing. It is possible that this *Le Grand Macabre* marks the end of a more aesthetically-challenging period for the Liceu. With the theatre's lurch towards a more self-sufficient existence, it may be more difficult to justify these kind of 'risky' operas in terms of funding as the Liceu seeks to have the highest possible paid occupancy. Much like every other private enterprise, the Liceu must work to convince the public to loosen the purse strings and invest in culture, often one of the first areas people reduce spending on in times of financial instability. Sadly, this financial instability means that productions like La Fura's *Le Grand Macabre* that have their own staunchly unusual, alternative aesthetic will be forced to make room for more commercially-successful productions that are by necessity more conservative. Just as the characters of *Le Grand Macabre* make the most of decadent Claudia's body to frolic and scramble before her imminent demise, La Fura

seizes what might be their last foray into the world of Spanish opera for the time being to blow an exceedingly smelly fart in the direction of the imminent demise of cultural expression at the hand of political, cultural and financial conservatism.

CAROL LÓPEZ'S *COSÍ FUN TUTTE*: GIRLS JUST WANT TO HAVE FUN (2012)

For the third of the case studies, rather than the previous large-scale spectacle of La Fura dels Baus's *Le Grand Macabre* or Calixto Bieito's *Carmen*, a Petit Liceu production was chosen to display an alternative to very "grown-up" operas. The Petit Liceu initiative provides what might be called 'opera light'; operas that have dispensed with the typically lengthy narrative devices in favour of a simpler structure and a few choice musical highlights from the best-known arias of each piece. Clarity of story is paramount as the Petit Liceu is aimed at younger audiences as a way of introducing opera to spectators who might find the preparatory knowledge frequently required for opera productions intimidating.

The Petit Liceu productions, which coincided with the theatre's reopening in 1999 are aimed at both parents and children as a way of introducing the world of opera and classical music to them as well as hopefully turning them into repeat customers, as well as operating as a kind of 'out-reach' programme for the opera house, as the Petit Liceu productions frequently tour to smaller venues, such as the Auditori in the suburban town of Cornellà de Llobregat, or the Teatre-Auditori Sant Cugat at the weekends (as of April 2014, these 'satellite' functions have been cancelled due to financial difficulties).³³³ Although the Petit Liceu productions are usually heavily edited to suit the short 70-minute running time, by and large the most famous arias in each

³³³ Q.F., 'El Petit Liceu abandona Cornellà', *El Periódico*, 1 April 2014, <<http://www.elperiodico.com/es/noticias/cornella/petit-liceu-abandona-cornella-3236881>> [Accessed 3 April 2014]

piece are retained, complementing the heightened visual aspect of the production. The visuals are usually large-scale, easily understood and colourful – *La Ventafocs* (Cinderella, adapted from Rossini's *La Cenerentola* by the Catalan performance troupe Els Comediants in 2008) is particularly representative of the Petit Liceu aesthetic – large pink wigs, oversized dresses, and an easily-understood, or well-known story that is largely conveyed by the actors' dialogue, which is usually in Catalan. These family-friendly works are heavily marketed during the Christmas and holiday periods as cultural outing for the entire family, and often have reduced prices to match.

For the production of *Cosí FUN Tutte*, the Liceu collaborated with Carol López, a prolific dramatist-director who was artistic director at Barcelona's Villarroel theatre from 2010 to 2013, when she replaced the Argentine Javier Daulte. López's theatre frequently concentrates on the relationships between various generations of women – such as *Tres dones i un llop* (Three Women and a Wolf, an adaptation of Little Red Riding Hood, 2010) and *L'any que ve serà millor* (Next Year Will Be Better, 2011) – and investigate themes of sexual politics: this and the comedic slant of her work at the Villarroel suggests that López was an ideal candidate to direct an opera that discusses the supposed roles of women and men in relationships and in the case of *Cosí FUN Tutte* the blurred lines of these roles so that the adaptation took on a more comedy of the sexes approach.

As previously mentioned, the Petit Liceu productions are very consciously localised in place (if not in time), and *Cosí FUN Tutte* is no exception to this. The production follows the general setting of López's theatre as produced at the Villarroel which is almost always set in Barcelona and shows a firm commitment to urban Catalan culture and the linguistic situations that arise from it; Barcelona is invariably the forum for her works and attempts to reflect the perceived linguistic practices of López's own

generation. Rather than making the (arguably unrealistic) decision to write her plays exclusively in one language, her characters are in their majority bilingual and switch freely between languages. López's point seems to be that, despite the linguistic battles carried out in the press regarding the use of either Catalan or Spanish as a vehicular language³³⁴, in the world she presents on the stage, Catalan is an essential part of life in Barcelona, and the importance of which is being recognised by foreigners. This is made clear in a part not frequently seen in either Catalan television or theatre: the play *Res no tornarà a ser com abans* (Nothing Will Ever Be the Same Again, 2012) features the American Andrew Tarbet. Although a 'guiri' (a mildly pejorative word indicating an 'uneducated' Northern European), Tarbet speaks unselfconsciously fluent Catalan with little accent, and participates in the frequent code-switching habitual in modern Catalan social situations. Although one might point out that López's characters largely match her own, young, Barcelona, middle-class origins, and as such might not reflect the whole spectrum of modern Catalan society, López makes a striking point about the increasingly essential role of the Catalan language as part of social integration. In having a foreigner participate in the linguistic mixture, López also makes a point that for Catalan to truly succeed in Barcelona, visible foreign Catalan-speakers need to be normalised in theatre and television. Although López attempts to recreate the public and private interchangeable use of both Castilian and Catalan in her works, she understands and supports the vehicular importance of the Catalan language for young people. *Cosí FUN Tutte* is clearly rooted in the Catalan language, both in the narrative dialogue and in its references, although the arias are kept in their original Italian. The

³³⁴ This is a topic frequently contested by the conservative Partido Popular, who claim that parents should have the right to choose the language their child is schooled in, as opposed to the current system by which children are taught in Catalan as a tool to normalise the language; supporters claim the use of Catalan in schools acts as a social unifier, detractors claim Castilian-speakers are at a disadvantage and suffer acts of anti-Castilian discrimination.

localisation of the work continues beyond the choice of Catalan as the main language: Ferrando and Guglielmo are catalanised as Ferran and Guillem (played by Carlos Cremades and Joan Garcia Gomà), while Dorabella and Fiordiligi become Dora and Flora (Anaïs Masllorens and Maria Miró respectively). Evidently, López's work shows a deep commitment to the Catalan language cause, but this does not mean that she is unaware of the comedic potential afforded by the bilingual situation. The playful intermingling of Catalan and Spanish languages allows the characters to provide an inside joke that pokes fun at the inherent regionalism and provincialism that López also sees as a part of Catalan culture. As an example of this gentle mocking prod of Catalan culture, when Guillem and Ferran make their appearance in disguise to their prospective dates Dora and Flora, Don Alfonso introduces them as Americans. López playfully contrasts the exotic attraction and patent glamour of America with an amusing shared concept of Catalonia as a place that is modest, pedestrian, and countrified. The inference is however, that Catalonia is overall a normal(ised) place: one of the boys complains of Don Alfonso's ruse: 'From the United States? Why couldn't I pretend to be from...I dunno, Olot?' [a small, provincial mountain town near Girona].³³⁵ López here is clearly gently mocking the occasional provinciality of Catalan culture, but more importantly, it is mocked as an inside joke with a metropolitan, Catalan-speaking audience.

Having set out her linguistic stall, López turns her attentions to the material at hand. Well aware of *Cosí fan tutte*'s reputation as a theatrical piece that has often been criticised as misogynistic, she subverts the cynicism of the opera's premise, choosing to largely ignore the accusations of misogyny levelled at the piece, opting instead for a more modern sexual comedy of errors approach in which she gives the female roles

³³⁵ 'D'Estats Units?! Per què no podria ser...no ho sé, d'Olot?'

more protagonism. In contrast to the figures of Ferran and Guillem, who are played as buffoons easily manipulated by Don Alfonso (Xavi Fernández), Dora and Flora are sassy, clever, modern women who seem to be as much part of the game (if not more so) as the boys, continuing López's own tradition of independent female figures as seen in *Tres dones i un llop*, for example. Indeed, the subtitle of the piece *Elles també volen divertir-se* could be translated as 'Girls just want to have fun (too)', a rather hackneyed use of Cyndi Lauper's 1985 song title, but the pop reference fits in with López's modern, clashy style, designed to appeal to a young theatre-going audience, whether on her home turf at the Teatre Villarroel or at this commission at the Liceu. Like their personalities, Flora and Dora's costumes are voluminous, modern and colourful, underlining their status as the main characters of the story.



Figure 10. Ferran, Guillem, Dora, Flora pre-deception and Don Alfonso © Antoni Bofill

The rather serious undertones of the ending, whereby the two men delight in deceiving their partners is dealt with in a way that is typical of López's approach to relationships

in general. In contrast to a more usual reading of the story, the revelation of the women's potential infidelity is empowering in López's version; rather than being the unthinking, flighty damsels that are attracted to any man that shows interest as suggested by the text, the premise of which is that two women would not recognise their thinly-disguised partners, the girls in López's version remain unrepentant in their deceiving actions. These young women are masters of their destiny, knowing perfectly well what their partners were up to. They lead their beaux on, lapping up their faked attention, and playing them at their own game. When the game is up at the end of the performance and the ruse is uncovered, there is the sensation that it is Flora and Dora that have 'won' as they ridicule Ferran and Guillem for their rash, childish actions. Despite the girls' victory, that is not to say there have been no repercussions, since both couples are irrevocably changed by the boys' actions, which have questioned the very foundations of both heterosexual relationships. Nevertheless, the relationship that has remained solid has been Dora and Flora's sense of sisterly solidarity. Flora and Dora's characterisation is typical of López's work, in that she has acquired something of a reputation as a director that places great emphasis and importance on the interrelationships between different generations of women. This can most clearly be seen in her works like *Germanes* (Sisters) (2008), the afore-mentioned *Tres dones i un llop* and *L'any que ve serà millor* (Next Year Will Be Better, 2011), a work starring four women written with fellow directors Victoria Szpunberg, Mercè Sarrias and Marta Buchaca.

In a posthumous essay published in the *Guardian*, Edward Said notes that *Cosí fan tutte* is so difficult to analyse precisely because:

It goes further toward the limits of acceptable, ordinary experiences of love, life, and ideas than either of its two immediate predecessors [*Don Giovanni* and *Le Nozze di Figaro*].³³⁶

As such, the work seems to exist on a purely superficial level. All six characters of *Cosí* (including Despina the maid) are unencumbered by past histories and appear only as representations of their dramatic functions. Superficiality is all in this opera: Fiordiligi and Dorabella's quasi-automatic switching of allegiances to their new lovers is preceded by the ease with which Guglielmo and Ferrando are swayed by Don Alfonso's assertion that 'cosí fan tutte'. This statement, which is considered problematic by opera critics for the sexist connotations involved, is given a different spin by López's re-alignment of the production's axis towards a noticeably more female point of view. Despite this, the piece is still problematic for its endorsement of this point of view and the acceptance of sexual infidelity as a fact of life where women are involved.

The production that appears at the Petit Liceu is something of a compromise: the adult content of the opera has been shoehorned into a format that does not deal with the complexity of the issue at hand and whose audience is ill-equipped to understand it. Part of the problematics of this production is that it was due to be included in the 2011-12 season as a fully-fledged adult opera, but was cancelled due to Carol López's pregnancy. Not wanting to waste the effort that had gone into the preparatory production work, it was converted into a small-scale format more suited to the Petit Liceu and its audience. At the Villarreal, López's plays revolve around sexuality and sexual tension and how the average person deals with these feelings in the alienation of a modern urban setting; indeed, the uncertain nature of human relationships is a

³³⁶ Edward Said, 'Unbearable lightness', the *Guardian*, 10 June 2006 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2006/jun/10/classicalmusicandopera.mozart>> [accessed 15 January 2013]

constant in her work. Several of her plays share the open-ended, inconclusive finale of *Cosí FUN Tutte*. The sexual 'comedy' *Res no tornarà a ser com abans* concluded with a clear final message: the difficult feelings brought about by interrelationships are not always entirely dealt with and resolved and the people involved are hurt and confused about the outcome. As such, the parting shot of the play is the question of precisely how to deal with these feelings, and this is the case with *Cosí FUN Tutte*. A needlessly complex situation arises between four friends, born of the aforementioned frivolous, misogynistic affirmation that women cannot help but be unfaithful. In the case of López's production Flora and Dora are wise to their partners' stupidity, and play them at their own game, and in doing so, claim their own autonomy as modern, self-realised women. They may be flighty, fickle women as the men suggest, but López makes them perfectly aware of their situation and the consequences of their actions. How far would they then go in this game? The 'unmasking' of Ferran and Guillem and the traditional fury of the women at being deceived is rendered almost irrelevant, as all the players in this sexual game knew what was going on and were actively participating: the unmasking, however, marks the end of the game and a transition into an unknown stage of the four's interrelationships. As in Mozart's opera, Lopez leaves the couples intact and there is an end to events, but the trauma that ensues from the events continues; there is a sense of great energies expended, but of immense issues yet to be resolved. This is a *Cosí* that raises serious questions about relationships, guilt and blackmail, and there is a sense at the end of the production that quite a large elephant is being ignored. Said notes:

‘Mozart never ventured closer to the potentially terrifying view he and Da Ponte seem to have uncovered of a universe shorn of any redemptive or palliative scheme.³³⁷

The repercussions of this statement cannot be further developed because of the characters’ water-tight sketching: since the dramatis personae exist merely in this moment, it is neither for us nor Mozart to ascribe moral values to them. Any possible consideration of moral stances disappeared when Guillem/Guglielmo and Ferran/Ferrando made their strikingly superficial bet a propos of nothing. They are, of course, aided in their cynical exercise by the even more cynical maid Despina, whose motives for abetting the men are as unclear as their motives for the bet in the first place.

The complex moral stances that are brought to light by *Cosí fan tutte* are clearly more adult than the Petit Liceu framework usually provides for, and this may go some way to explaining why the Liceu attempted to pitch the piece as an ‘all audiences welcome’, aware that the more mature content was suitable only for older teenagers and adults. However, the success of this is questionable, as a large part of the audience for the production on the Saturday public function was young children accompanied by their parents. This begs the question as to whether the show was really suitable for all audiences – opera critic Jaume Radigales suggested that the thematic content of the show made it unsuitable for anyone under 10 years of age.³³⁸

The press reaction to the piece was mixed: *El País* reviewer Lourdes Morgades entitled her piece ‘Mozart per a adolescents’ (Mozart for teenagers), hinting that López had managed to both over-simplify and over-sex the opera the piece in her

³³⁷ Edward Said, ‘Unbearable lightness’, *The Guardian*, 10 June 2006 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2006/jun/10/classicalmusicandopera.mozart>> [accessed 15 January 2013]

³³⁸ Jaume Radigales, ‘Operetta i Mozart “fun” al Liceu’, 1 October 2012 <http://dieteroperistic.blogspot.com.es/2012_10_01_archive.html> [accessed 15 January 2013]

adaptation.³³⁹ Morgades criticised López for working on the apparent assumption that teenagers would enjoy, or at least find the concept of cheating on their partner amusing, and would also enjoy involving them and a willing other couple in a strange pas-de-quatre involving mutual deceit and their best friends. In this case the difficulty of reconciling the very adult moral complexity of the story, the short running time and its intended audience becomes clear. Although the deceit is an integral part of *Cosí fan tutte*'s story, the opera's focus is undoubtedly Mozart's music and Da Ponte's libretto. In this stripped back, almost minimalistic version, López takes the opera down a gear, closer to musical theatre than opera. López has undoubtedly simplified the thematic of the work to make it more suitable (and more, importantly, interesting) for the audience that the Liceu is attempting to attract, but has taken a different approach to suit her own directing style. The show-stopping arias and music remain central to the plot, but there is a greater need for the singers to act in order to convey the story. López's directing style is humorous as shown by her frequent knowing in-jokes with the audience, but here she must rely on visual gags, and thus the singer-actors' comedic ability, to tell the story to make up for the lack of arias that usually move the story along. Given this truncated version, the story itself takes on a much more visible plane: the duplicity and pretence inherent to the opera are more clearly seen than in a telling of the story that relies on the story being moved on musically.

This staging builds on the Liceu's sesiones golfas (late-night sessions) that featured as late night performances in the Liceu Foyer during the 2005-06 season. The timing of these productions was an explicit way of demonstrating that there were productions that moved away from conventional re-tellings of operas that made use of

³³⁹ Lourdes Morgades, 'Mozart per a adolescents', *El País*, 3 October 2012 <http://ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2012/10/03/quadern/1349297622_199980.html> [accessed 12 March 2013]

the intimate space of the Liceu Foyer as a kind of opera speakeasy with more liberal overtones. One of these productions was an all-male *Cosí fan tutte*, originally a German production from Berlin, reduced the orchestra to two sets of pianists playing the accompaniment to an entirely male cast, who transferred Mozart's (tragi)comic opera to the setting of an elegant modern apartment. Despite Joan Matabosch's warning in *ABC* that the production was 'not suitable for Mozart purists or fundamentalists',³⁴⁰ the production was criticised not for the mildly scandalous content, but for the singers' poor technique, even taking into account the obvious limitations of assigning parts usually sung by a soprano and mezzo soprano to men (in the case of Fiordiligi, the tessitura is considered taxing even for a soprano).³⁴¹ Beyond the critique of the singers' vocal ability, in his review Javier Pérez Senz applauded the novel approach to the opera, although noted that the production was more successful the less faithful it was to Mozart's opera, citing the visual humour as the strong point of the piece.³⁴² Reviews of the piece (both in Barcelona and on home turf in Berlin) noted that the homosexual pairings removed the opera's overtones of misogyny and instead shifted the topic of the opera towards a consideration of the fragility of human relationships as a whole. The *Berliner Zeitung* considered this something of a pointless exercise within the context of *Cosí fan tutte*,³⁴³ but Pérez Senz approved of the gesture within the framework set by piece which embraced the (perceived or real) fickleness of male homosexual

³⁴⁰ Pablo Menéndez-Haddad, 'El Liceu consolida su línea artística con una temporada plagada de estrellas', *ABC*, 19 January 2005 <http://www.abc.es/hemeroteca/historico-19-01-2005/abc/Espectaculos/el-liceo-consolida-su-linea-artistica-con-una-temporada-plagada-de-estrellas_2088508870.html> [accessed 15 January 2013]

³⁴¹ Javier Pérez Senz, 'Escollos insalvables', *El País*, 19 December 2005 <http://elpais.com/diario/2005/12/19/espectaculos/1134946806_850215.html> [accessed 15 January 2013]

³⁴² *Ibid.*

³⁴³ Wolfgang Fuhrmann, 'Mein Lieber Herr Gesangverein', *Berliner Zeitung*, 16 August 2003 <<http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/archiv/mozarts--cos--fan--tutte--an--der--neukoellner--oper--mein--lieber--herr--gesangsverein,10810590,10108582.html>> [accessed 15 January 2013]

relationships and calqued it onto human relationships in general as non-linear, complex interactions in which there may or may not be clear motives for the characters' actions. Just as in *Res no tornarà a ser igual* there is a very clear end of events, but no real 'resolution' and the latter echoes *Cosí fan tutte*'s limited but defined moral framework.

Given the complexity of the moral issues displayed in *Cosí fan tutte* that López has reproduced as a recurring theme in her work at the Villarroel, I would argue that her directing style would be better served on a full-scale, adult performance of the production. The complex themes of her opera lend themselves to her relationship-centred works, and the inherent intricacy of the morality and personal interest provide her with multiple options for re-interpretation of the typical male-female binary (and the German homosexual re-routing of *Cosí fan tutte* is just an example) – the limitations of the Petit Liceu format in terms of the intended audience are made more patent given that López starts an incursion into the ambiguous territory raised by the issues, only to not be able to develop the story further. The end effect is one of a piece that in aesthetic and format was suitably uncomplicated and approachable, but in topic is far too mature for the intended audience, but offers an intriguing insight into what López might have been able to do with a full-blown operatic production. As such, *Cosí FUN Tutte* is somehow unsatisfying in that it does not really fulfill its remit as a Petit Liceu production: the topic is too adult and morally ambiguous for a young audience, but the production itself is too childish to satisfy adult or even teenage audiences as it stands. As mentioned before, it gives a glimpse of what could have been an interestingly modern take on a traditional opera, but the opera is too constrained by its format and intended audience to truly succeed.

CONCLUSION

Much like *Le Grand Macabre*, *Cosí FUN Tutte* is built around the premise of taking the opera as a moment in time, without context, and discourages a search for meaning beyond that displayed by the dramaturgy. This is not to say that both works are entirely superficial: they are self-contained operas that have a succinct message that does not fit within what might be considered mainstream morality. Theirs is a position that is stated relatively obviously: in the case of *Cosí FUN Tutte* sexual ambiguity and in *Le Grand Macabre* the acceptance and celebration of decadence and death. However, these functions bear no relation to contemporary circumstances, and are to be taken as a kind of stage experiment in each case, with little room for re-examination or re-interpretation. As noted in the relevant section, the undertones of *Carmen* are similarly seamy and the sexual suggestiveness that Bieito brings out using both Zúñiga and Carmen herself bring the piece in line with the other two works that tread the edges of what might be considered morally ambiguous. As seen by Calixto Bieito's staging, *Carmen* is an opera that suits many re-interpretations and his setting of the work in a vaguely Francoist Spain lends the piece an emotionally-loaded dimension. Of the three works *Carmen* and *Cosí FUN Tutte* are the most clearly localised closest to home, but the timely universality of *Le Grand Macabre* has its own resonance for a theatre audience likely to be well-acquainted with the financial circumstances. The restrictions imposed by the financial straitjacketing of cultural resources have taken several seasons to really make their presence felt on the Liceu stage, but as the planning cycles affected by the recession bore their fruit, they transmitted a certain amount of foreboding and have been interpreted as a disappearing moment of the cultural expression cultivated by the Liceu over the previous decade before market forces ultimately dictate the theatre's programme. The works mentioned in this final chapter give a sample of what the Liceu

is produces today – works that reflect the difficult state of culture in a county deeply affected by the recession. The 2012-13 and 2013-14 seasons at the Liceu have had fewer productions with ‘auteur’ directors than previous years, and have chosen to focus on celebratory events such as the Festival Bayreuth at the Liceu in 2012-13 and Verdi’s bicentenary in 2013-14 and multiple productions of opera favourites (in March 2014 *Tosca* has 15 performances planned).

Nevertheless, the Liceu attempts to maintain the theatre’s reputation by welcoming local resident theatre creators with international reputations in an exchange of ideas: the creators’ reputation is enhanced by their stagings at one of Europe’s top opera houses and the Liceu’s reputation for modernity and relevance is heightened by their collaboration with some of Europe’s most avant-guard theatre practitioners who practise their art within a short distance from the Liceu.

THE GRAN TEATRE DEL LICEU: A CONCLUSION

This thesis has attempted to communicate the cultural, social and historical weight of the Gran Teatre del Liceu as an institution whose beginnings, past, present and future are intimately connected physically and demographically to the city of Barcelona. As a product historically of civil society and then latterly of public funding and cultural management, the theatre represents a continuum of a section of Barcelona society that has changed and adapted according to the political and financial circumstances it has lived in.

The importance of this adaptation to circumstance has been seen in the literary appearances the opera house makes in Catalan and Spanish literature: the metonymic value of the Liceu as a nexus for the upper echelons of society is arguably justifiable in a historical context, but the re-use of the Liceu as a motor for change in *Barcelona, mapa d'ombres*, in which the theatre responds and adapts (or in this case, is burnt down) to what the city wants. Joan Tàpia (ex-director of the daily newspaper *La Vanguardia*), in the prologue of Antoni Batista's *Barcelona i el Liceu: Història d'un repte*, puts forward the argument that the 1994 fire was far more effective in consolidating the Liceu as truly *barceloní* institution than any bureaucratic measures:

Because of the accident, a part of the city that perhaps was still alien to the Liceu, or that saw it as a distant institution, discovered that the Liceu was theirs too, just like the Palau de la Música was, or Barcelona football club, the Sagrada Família or the Picasso Museum.³⁴⁴

³⁴⁴ 'Amb la desgràcia, una part de la ciutat que encara era potser refractària al Liceu, o el veia com una cosa llunyana, va descobrir que el Liceu també era seu, com seus són el Palau de la Música, el Camp del Barça, la Sagrada Família o el Museu Picasso.' Antoni Batista, *Barcelona i el Liceu: Història d'un repte* (Barcelona: La Vanguardia, 1994), p. 9.

The fact that the 1994 fire at the Liceu provoked widespread mourning from the public, who regarded the event as a tragic loss for the city (Tom Sutcliffe notes, somewhat ironically, that opera houses have a certain tendency to burn down),³⁴⁵ underlines this connection. Josep Pla wryly notes, referring to the 1868 fire: 'In some way, the fire gave prestige to the Liceu, because the destiny of theatres of this type seems to be to undergo one of these kinds of calamities'.³⁴⁶ In Cunillé's *Barcelona, mapa d'ombres* the 1994 fire, and in Pla's writings, the 1868 conflagration are seen as a trial to be overcome for the Liceu to consolidate its reputation as a 'true' opera house, and to make itself understood as an essential part of Barcelona's cultural and social infrastructure.

Antoni Batista, ex-director of Communications at the Liceu, argues that it was only when the Liceu burnt down in 1994 that the people of Barcelona came to conceive of the Liceu as much part of their city as landmarks like the Camp Nou or the Sagrada Família. Indeed, Jordi Millán, director of La Cubana theatre company acknowledged that he was inspired to write *Una nit d'òpera* from the sight of a woman in tears on La Rambla who had never seen the interior of the Liceu;³⁴⁷ an evidently emotional reaction to an institution that the woman had never visited, but nevertheless respected. The woman mourned the Liceu as an essential, unique part of a Catalan cultural body that she had not missed until it was gone.

The accident provoked almost unanimous agreement that the opera house should be immediately rebuilt and improved, illustrated by the appearance of paraphernalia from the construction company FCC on the morning after the fire. There

³⁴⁵ Tom Sutcliffe, *Believing in Opera* (London, Faber & Faber, 1998), p. 416.

³⁴⁶ 'En certa manera, l'incendi donà prestigi al Liceu, perquè el destí dels teatres d'aquest tipus és haver passat, sembla, per una d'aquestes desgràcies.' Josep Pla, *Barcelona: Papers d'un estudiant: Obres completes*, 5 (Barcelona: Selecta, 1956) p. 199.

³⁴⁷ Maria Delgado, *'Other' Spanish Theatres: Erasure and Inscription on the Twentieth-Century Spanish Stage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 271.

is, however, a political dimension to the rapidity of this reaction: Burgos Cathedral had been suffering 'stone sickness' over a long period of time with no funds from the government until a statue fell off the façade of the building in 1994, and questions were raised in the Castilla y León region by the regional Partido Popular leader Juan José Lucas as to why Catalonia was swiftly accorded the funds to rebuild an icon of their culture whereas they were not.³⁴⁸ This situation was resolved by the Liceu orchestra playing a gala concert in aid of the cathedral's reconstruction and some oblique diplomacy from then-President of the Generalitat, Jordi Pujol, who noted that 'sometimes every cloud has a silver lining.'³⁴⁹ The gesture was warmly welcomed by the city, who organized a concert by the Castilla y León orchestra at the Palau de la Música with the funds being given to the Liceu reconstruction fund.³⁵⁰ The example throws into relief the differing links between city and building, each highly representative of their respective location: Burgos Cathedral was precisely that, a religious meeting point in a conservative, Catholic city whose architecture was its main feature, but the Liceu on the other hand was architecturally modest, but acted as a cultural meeting point whose history had lent it wider meaning as a Catalan bourgeois (but nevertheless citizen-based) institution. Thus, a sense of loss at the destruction of the theatre was turned into an opportunity to improve and update arguably one of the most out-of-date theatres in Spain to become one of the most technically advanced.

³⁴⁸ Lourdes Morgades, 'La orquesta del Liceo tocará la 'Novena' a beneficio de la catedral de Burgos', *El País*, 25 March 1994 <http://elpais.com/diario/1994/03/25/cultura/764550011_850215.html> [accessed 31 July 2013]

³⁴⁹ 'En ocasiones no hay mal que por bien no venga.' Miguel Calvo, 'La Orquesta del Liceo de Barcelona toca en favor de la catedral de Burgos', *El País*, 10 April 1994 <http://elpais.com/diario/1994/04/10/cultura/765928801_850215.html> [accessed 31 July 2013]

³⁵⁰ V. M. Niño, 'Castilla y León se unió con Cataluña para la defensa de su patrimonio', *El Norte de Castilla*, 19 October 1994, p. 45.

This modernisation of the theatre coincides with Barcelona's turn-of-the-century massive public works schemes, and as such, has been a part of a large-scale recalibration of the city's physical landscape. Tàpia and Batista appear to concede that while the Liceu was indubitably an important part of the city's physical make-up, it wasn't necessarily a part that inspired affection amongst large sections of the population. The above comment that the Liceu had joined the Palau de la Música in the city's affections is illuminating in that it might betray something of Barcelona's relationship to the Liceu; in a city well-endowed in remarkable architecture, the modest Liceu frontage is nowhere near as striking as Domènech i Muntaner's sinuous, polychromatic façade for the Palau de la Música. The visibly *modernista*, and as such *catalanista* form and function of the Palau as the home of the Orfeó Català, together with its Catalan focus might be perceived as being the more accessible cousin of the more European-facing, internationalist Liceu. Batista argues that to the 'democratisation' of the Liceu via the formation of a consortium involving the regional government of Catalonia, the Generalitat and the city hall of Barcelona made the institution more transparent and accountable to the population. Like the Palau de la Música (and especially since the latter's embezzlement scandal came to light),³⁵¹ the Liceu is under greater public scrutiny than ever: if the theatre existed on extravagant patronage previously, a still-considerable amount of public money funds the artistic programme, even in the recession. Whether the funding is local, regional or national, the Liceu has a responsibility to provide value for money for the people that pay for it. This greater public stake in the institution helped to change the perception of the citizens of

³⁵¹ More information on the 'caso Palau' scandal can be found, amongst others, at Lourdes Morgades, 'El saqueo del Palau', *El País*, 13 September 2009 <http://elpais.com/diario/2009/09/13/catalunya/1252804040_850215.html> [accessed 31 July 2013]

Barcelona towards the Liceu, even in its pre-fire configuration. The restructuring of the Liceu turned it from an institution that had been irrelevant to large parts of the citizens of Barcelona to an increasingly visible cultural establishment. In this respect, the fire at the Liceu was providential; the restructuring of the institution in the 1980s and 1990s in financial and directorial terms was already providing results in the form of larger audiences and critical approval due to improved casting, choir and orchestras, but the building was unable to compete technically with its European competitors such as the then-recently built Opéra Bastille.

It seems clear that, as far as literature is concerned, the days of the intractability of the Liceu have gone; instead, the Liceu's duty to be more accountable to the public has potentially led to a greater transparency, in turn leading to more developed, sensitive appearances in literature that investigate the role of the Liceu within Barcelona, and the status of the relationship between Liceu and *barceloní* is questioned (as in *Barcelona, mapa d'ombres*) and both their roles in the creation of a personal cityscape, with references and depictions of the institution going beyond mere metonymy to an appraisal of the buildings status within the city. I would argue that Tàpia's comment is perceptive in that the Liceu has become integrated into Barcelona's imaginary on a much more accessible level than before the fire through a combination of the 1994 fire exposing what the theatre really meant to Barcelona, and then a subsequent treatment in literature (here I refer to Cunillé's *Barcelona, mapa d'ombres*) that made the theatre more 'permeable' and relevant to the citizens of Barcelona. This new 'approachability' has opened the Liceu up for greater investigation and exploration by the city's writers and playwrights, the actions and considerations of which further help 'normalise' the institution and its relationship to the city.

The Liceu is, however, an institution whose structural complexity is difficult to grasp. Repeatedly this thesis has attempted to convey something of the elaborate structure of the theatre which itself is further complicated by the levels of bureaucracy imposed by the city, regional and national government as an institution whose funding is largely publically-contributed. Nevertheless, the importance of this funding is secondary to the power structures at play in the theatre. The multi-layered set-up, including not only the various government representatives, but also the associated ex-owners and interest groups, has proved itself to be a structure open to abuse through executive director Joan Francesc Marco's actions as detailed in the 'Politics and Culture' section of the Chapter 4, El Liceu de Tots. Marco has taken advantage of his power for his own ends and to ensure his own survival in his attempt to control the theatre, and yet remain unaccountable for his actions, as evidenced by the ERE and his appearance at the Parlament de Catalunya.

BARCELONA, POLITICS AND BRANDING

Fortunately, cultural life in Barcelona is undergoing a certain amount of change with new directors in the various 'national'-level theatres, at the Liceu and at the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya, and as the Liceu entered its 166th season, the outlook seemed positive due to an event that will have serious and hopefully positive repercussions for the theatre: the unpopular and discredited Joan Francesc Marco did not have his contract renewed, freeing the theatre of what might well be one of the main problems of the previous years and hopefully paving the way for a an Executive Director that will be able to co-operate with workforce to take the Liceu forwards in times of increasing economic difficulty. In a sense, the disappearance of Joan Francesc Marco represents

something of an unexpected opportunity for the Liceu to restructure itself, possibly following the German model of 'executive' and 'artistic' director being the same person, and harking back to the model of the *empresari* in the middle and latter part of the 20th century. Rather than working against artistic director Joan Matabosch in his programming as had been the case in the past, this could have been the opportunity for the Liceu to gauge what the institution really needed in an executive director. Marco's predecessor Rosa Cullell was a more hands-off director following her trajectory as a cultural manager: a businesswoman who left the cultural programming to the artistic director, and her predecessor Josep Caminal was the director that guided the Liceu through the fire and worked with Matabosch to create a Liceu that was less tied to political influence and more accountable to the public through providing an approach to culture that distanced itself from the decadent Pàmies years to offer a truly *barceloní* and innovative opera repertoire.

The thesis has described how the years of relative bonanza of the late 1990s and early 2000s have allowed the Liceu to cultivate its reputation as an operatic theatre that tends towards the modern and cutting-edge, making the most of the vanguard directors and companies that have come out of Spain during the past decades as a result of the boom years of the 1990s and early to mid 2000s, and giving operatic institutional legitimacy to directors like Calixto Bieito and Carol López and collectives like Els Comediants and La Fura dels Baus, illustrating the key part the Liceu has in this creation of modern theatre culture not only in Barcelona, but with a Spanish and international projection. As the Liceu moves into the future, the recession and the disappearance of the obstructive Joan Francesc Marco allows an opportunity to make some serious changes to its infrastructure. The previous system of various casts and performances led to an average number of performances that was well above other national-level

opera theatres and brought little economic justification. During the bountiful times of the early 2000s as the Liceu was enjoying its post-fire revitalisation this elevated number of functions per opera was an affordable luxury, but as the Government cutbacks to the Department of Cultures at a central, regional and local level began to bite, the Liceu has been slow to react. This is due to the nature of opera programming, which is planned three or four years in advance, and so naturally the effects of economic shifts tend to be slow to manifest themselves, except in the case of sudden measures to rectify a supposedly unsustainable economic situation. This can be seen in the ERE imposed on the Liceu in 2012, and those EREs to come in 2013 and 2014.³⁵² Clearly, the problem for the new Executive Director of the Liceu as described earlier in the thesis is how to balance the forward planning required for opera production with the difficulties of an economic climate that is unstable given that cultural subsidies are cut year on year, and have been known to be cut just before the season is about to start, or indeed, mid-season. This, of course, is something of a problem all around Europe, but the situation seems to be particularly acute in Spain, given the suddenness with which events like the ERE are announced and the ongoing uncertain economic outlook.

Despite the economic and governing difficulties the Liceu has had, this thesis has sought to underline the heavyweight contribution that the theatre makes to modern Spanish and Catalan culture through the fostering and creation of dramaturgically and stylistically remarkable works that demonstrate the Liceu's, and by extension, Barcelona's commitment to the creation of locally-based, vernacular strands of international culture. Thus, the Liceu is an essential part of Barcelona's cultural export in that it provides the space, technology for directors and artists to create a brand of

³⁵² EFE, 'El Liceu presenta un ERE temporal', *La Vanguardia* 2 July 2013
<<http://www.lanvanguardia.com/cultura/20130702/54377162516/el-liceu-presenta-un-ere-temporal>> [accessed 29 August 2013]

culture through its co-productions that is transferrable, but bears distinctively Barcelona hallmarks.

With regard to the future, the uniquely *barceloní* character of the Liceu has been much consolidated by the arrival of Josep Pons as musical director. His appointment can also be seen as something of a step in the right direction, not only in terms of creating a managerial structure for the opera house in which the Liceu is seen as the final product and the main aim of efforts, rather than being a reward for a loyal party member, but also as part of an even greater *barceloní* focus for the opera house in that Pons will be the first Barcelona-based musical director of the Liceu orchestra that also has a proven track record of success in his field. In addition, the fact that the Liceu has committed to using a talent-spotting agency to search for the replacement for Joan Francesc Marco is a sign that the Liceu is committed to finding candidates that are suited for the job based on their professional experience, be it as musicians, economists or cultural planners. The importance of the external search for the candidate is that it in theory removes the political element of appointments, and will hopefully result in someone with the track record in artistic practice and/or management of Josep Pons or Joan Matabosch as executive director of the Liceu.

It is to be hoped that the change in governance will be reflected in a change of programming and remit for the Liceu. The years of the recession have not been kind to the Liceu, and the theatre had arguably become complacent in aspects such as citizen responsibility – it is a curious fact that when the theatre was run as a private enterprise the governing of the theatre was done through various representational bodies that were the voice of the ‘stock-holders’. The transition to a more publically-funded system that prioritised culture, arguably made the Liceu become too comfortable in terms of its relationship to the public that are directly paying for the tickets and the public that

indirectly contribute through their taxes. However, the reduction of public budgets has forced many theatres, including Madrid's Teatro Real, to create programmes that balance as far as they can their artistic novelty and their needs to self-finance, and this is a shift that has proved to be protracted and difficult given the nature of opera programming and management. These are problems that being dealt with, and the structures that make these issues more complex are being simplified though processes like co-productions in order to pool resources and bring greater flexibility to the processes of opera creation.

COMMUNICATION AND THE LICEU: FUTURE STRATEGIES

When I completed this thesis, the news that Joan Francesc Marco would not have his contract renewed offered a point of optimism: a possibility for some thinking about the role of the Executive Director's role. Joan Matabosch's resignation in September 2013 to take up the artistic directorship of the Teatro Real offers a veritable challenge for the theatre and the possibility of a change of direction. This thesis can now be seen – in retrospect- as a reflection on the Matabosch years. It has underlined how Matabosch, from his definitive appointment in 1998 to his resignation in 2013, placed a great focus on the Liceu's relationship with the media as part of a conscious effort to make the theatre a relevant and highly visible part of the Barcelona cultural scene. This has served to use the projection of one of Europe's most culturally dynamic cities to rejuvenate operatic form and to attract new opera consumers with modern, culturally-relevant forms and productions. The artistic director spoke of a modern cultural consumer that reads, visits museums, art exhibitions, and theatres whose cultural 'pack'

is incomplete if opera is left out,³⁵³ indicating that the Liceu must project itself as an essential part of Barcelona culture in the same way the MACBA (Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art), MNAC (National Art Museum of Catalonia) and CCCB (Barcelona Centre for Contemporary Culture) are posited as ‘essential’ tenets of Barcelona culture: it is not enough that the Liceu has a station on Barcelona’s arguably most visible street. The Liceu has had to aggressively market itself to convince both locals and visitors that their money spent at the Liceu is a wise investment in a quality cultural product.

In terms of cultural spending and economic restrictions, the theatre been thrust into the press for the wrong reasons: the constant appearances in the press with regard to the Liceu’s viability and the threat of closure have arguably created the public image of an institution in distress, compounded by silence during the ERE process in early 2012 from the Gran Teatre del Liceu that goes against its usual programme of active publication and dissemination of productions and information about productions. This in turn has directly affected the subscription holders who have seen their investment in the Liceu devalued as productions were cancelled with little notice, definitively damaging the theatre’s reputation and creating an embarrassing public relations moment for an institution that prides itself on its connection with the public. In order to assuage the difficulties played out in the press after the ERE, Joan Matabosch appeared in numerous national magazines (*L’Avenç*, *La Revista de Catalunya*), in the press and on the television to promote the Liceu and to attempt to repair the damage done to the theatre’s reputation by the silence about the Liceu’s financial problems. He used his background in journalism and sociology in his role as a media representative of the Liceu to support the theatre, but also to convince potential attendees that, as far as

³⁵³ Francesc Cortès, ‘Francesc Cortès entrevista Joan Matabosch’, *La Revista de Catalunya*, 2012 (280), 111-132, p. 118.

possible, it is business as usual, and the mis-steps of recent seasons are a one-off. Over and over again Matabosch stated that his remit was to convert the Liceu into a cultural habit in Barcelona: he attempted to programme works that had never been seen before in the city and to bring to the stage new productions of operas that already had something of a pedigree at the Liceu so as to broaden the spectrum of the operatic experience and maintain the Liceu's reputation for innovation, both at home and abroad. In his interview with *L'Avenç* in 2010 Matabosch noted that while the growth of the Liceu in terms of tickets sold and subscriptions was very strong (tripling the numbers of cities much larger than Barcelona),³⁵⁴ creating meaningful content for the subscriptions and sustainably maintaining the programme with such a large number of productions and visitors was difficult.³⁵⁵ However, he firmly underlined the importance of strong and frequent communication with the public, and as artistic director argued that this communication is key to creating the sustainability required for the Liceu to continue. In his view, it is always the theatre's responsibility to ensure that the audience that attend leave the Liceu with an enhanced comprehension of the complex spectacle displayed before them.³⁵⁶ This communication seems to have been stepped up considerably in the recession years as a way of keeping the Liceu in the public eye, and this close focus on promoting and educating society on the Liceu has proved key to the project's ongoing success. Information sheets detailing the narrative of the opera that are designed, in Matabosch's word, 'to be read on the metro',³⁵⁷ the hand programmes that present the season as a whole and use visual clues to create a theme for the different works, multi-language subtitling and the Foyer presentations of the operas

³⁵⁴ Cortès, 'Francesc Cortès entrevista Joan Matabosch', p. 116.

³⁵⁵ Josep M. Muñoz, 'Joan Matabosch: El programa del Liceu', *L'Avenç*, 354, February 2010, 16-28, p. 23.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Cortès, 'Francesc Cortès entrevista Joan Matabosch', p. 118.

have all been designed to sustainably retain those habitual Liceu consumers and to attract new ones. Similarly, the Liceu has been at the forefront of digitalising both productions and archives as a way to bring new productions to a wider public (all are sold, for example, in the Liceu's basement store), which increases the Liceu's reputation for spreading the novel applications of modern and post-modern dramaturgy around the world, and thus the theatre's own prestige for having a markedly didactic programme of both productions and dissemination. In 2012, there were almost 50 DVDs of Liceu productions available with subtitles in Catalan, Spanish, English, French, Italian and on occasions, Mandarin.³⁵⁸

As a way to continue the Liceu's efforts in the area of audiovisual dissemination and to ensure opera's ongoing presence in public cultural life in Barcelona, the popular FNAC music and technology store in Barcelona's upmarket Illa Diagonal shopping centre is projecting opera productions in-store for free on Monday evenings from August 2013 onwards. This initiative seems to be an echo of the cinema screenings of operatic productions the Liceu has done over the previous years (starting with *La Traviata* in 2000), with regular screenings of productions both in Barcelona and in regional theatres and cinemas, but given that cinema has also suffered from the increase in VAT mentioned on page 169 the free projections seek to keep opera in the mind of the public as a way to promote the art form itself given that the current economic situation only allows a limited scope for such dissemination. In his interview with Francesc Cortès, Matabosch cites this as a prime objective for the Liceu over the coming

³⁵⁸ In his interview with Francesc Cortès, Joan Matabosch notes that the Liceu was the first opera house to produce digital and audiovisual copies of a number of operas, both international, Spanish and Catalan: Henze's *Boulevard Solitude* (2007), Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* (2004), José Luis Turina's *D.Q. Don Quijote en Barcelona* (2000), Joan Guinjoan's *Gaudí* (2004), Montsalvatge's *El gato con botas* (2011) and *Una voce in off* (2002), Wolf-Ferrari's *Sly* (2006), Ligeti's *Le Grand Macabre* (2011), and Rossini's *La gazzetta* (2005). *Ibid.*, p. 122.

years when the economic outlook stabilises.³⁵⁹ In a similar vein, since 2012, the Liceu has employed promotional staff outside the theatre to sell any remaining tickets and publicise upcoming performances and productions, and has taken to guerrilla marketing and flyposting to market certain works (such as *Cosí FUN Tutte*, the poster for which appeared plastered on buildings all over Barcelona shortly before the production's run). It might be argued that methods such as last-minute ticket selling and flyposting production posters and their perceived inappropriateness might be less damaging to the theatre's reputation than the embarrassment caused by the announcement and subsequent retraction of the ERE and the cancelled productions. These techniques, which might even be deemed habitual in standard theatre economics, seem to be pragmatic measures that the Liceu has resorted to in this time of recession, when economic reality has dictated that the Liceu must improve its already impressive attendance figures to full houses as much as possible in order to be viable. The extent to which this will be possible with the multiple performances that are scheduled for the 2013-14 season is unclear - filling 15 consecutive performances of *Tosca* may prove to be difficult, but recent evidence suggests that this is not the case. Matabosch cites that for 2012's production of *Le nozze de Figaro*, 32,000 seats were placed on sale over fourteen performances with a very impressive occupancy rate of 98.58%. Matabosch further contextualises this noting that Mozart's operas were practically unattended by the mid-century Liceu audience due to their aversion to works that did not prioritise a single voice over a choir and balanced cast of voices, and cites the work of historic *empresaris* Mestres Calvet (1915-47) and Pàmies (1947-1980) for their work in

³⁵⁹ Francesc Cortès, 'Francesc Cortès entrevista Joan Matabosch', pp. 126-7.

bringing these more ensemble productions to the Liceu, contributing to their modern success as borne out by the impressive statistics above.³⁶⁰

In addition to these measures the Liceu has, on several occasions, created television adverts for several of its productions to be advertised on Catalan television channels TV3 and Barcelona TV, as well as on the metro's *MouTV* information channel displayed on video screens and projections in the stations and trains – 2012-13's *L'elisir d'amore* was widely advertised through this medium in the months previous to its premiere, as was season opener *La forza del destino*. This thesis has shown that despite the economic downturn and the difficulties presented by the ERE, the Liceu's pursuit of alternative methods to fill the theatre shows an encouraging willingness to adapt to the current economic situation. The above measures, in addition to Joan Matabosch's interviews in press and television, demonstrate that a visibility factor appears to be the theatre's main tool in attracting custom.

THE FUTURE

Joan Matabosch's departure from the Liceu in September 2013 to the Teatro Real in Madrid brings to a close a period of definitive change at the Liceu. His transferral to the capital has stirred rumours of problems at the Liceu, seeing as the man who has steered the theatre through period of fire, success and famine has taken the decision to work for the Barcelona theatre's most arch rival. *Operanews* noted that Matabosch had been appointed by the Real for a six-year term with immediate effect,³⁶¹ replacing Mortier as artistic director. He was nevertheless permitted to carry on his work at the Liceu until

³⁶⁰ Francesc Cortès, 'Francesc Cortès entrevista Joan Matabosch', p. 122.

³⁶¹ Anon., 'Madrid's Teatro Real Dismisses Artistic Director Gerard Mortier, Announces Liceu's Joan Matabosch as Immediate Replacement', 11 September 2013 <http://www.operanews.com/Opera_News_Magazine/2013/9/News/Mortier_Matabosch.html> [accessed 28th February 2014]

his replacement was found, Mortier was reported to be unhappy with the decision to choose a Spanish successor, citing that there were 'more talented international administrators'³⁶² that he would rather had taken over at the Real.

Matabosch's continuing commitment to the Liceu despite his starting at the Real could be considered proof of his dedication to the theatre where he forged his reputation as an artistic director. It might also point to a problematic role in running a new institution which would inevitably be seen as a competitive rival. Could he keep the interests of the Liceu at the forefront with a new primary commitment to the Real?

Matabosch's programme, especially since the 1999 re-opening, has been focussed on providing a balanced, but wide-ranging selection of operas, including original Liceu productions like *D.Q. Don Quijote en Barcelona*, provocatively modern readings such as Bieito's *Un ballo in maschera* (2001), *Wozzeck* (2007) and *Carmen* (2010), and more conventional productions that became classic operas in their own right, such as the *Aida* using Mestres Cabanes's set (1945). Matabosch's programme helped to cement the Liceu as an international-level theatre that was able to attract top-flight productions that made use of Catalan and Spanish theatrical talent, bringing theatre to the opera and opera to the cinema. He promoted coproductions, including a number with the Real, and looked to promote the work of local practitioners to a greater degree than his predecessors at the Real.

Arguably Matabosch's focus on the blurring of opera, theatre and the public is his greatest legacy for the Liceu. He was unafraid of making the Liceu a site for interdisciplinary innovation during the early and mid-2000s, engaging the best of Catalan and Spanish artists and practitioners from the field of the arts. His use of local

³⁶² Ibid.

artists was explicitly designed to root the Liceu into the city and to make use of the talent available within the region to create a series of works with international vocation bearing the hallmarks of the theatre, and the city by extension.

After surviving several rounds of spending cuts, Matabosch's approach seemed to be one of financial pragmatism, accepting the complicated cultural infrastructure in Barcelona for what it is, and making savvy decisions about a more modest programming at the moment in an attempt to balance retaining existing custom and make money to be able to continue staging operatic works that go beyond traditional aesthetics to explore more experimental or avant-garde approaches to the medium. This thesis demonstrated the artistic director's commitment to making use of the talent available locally in conjunction with the opportunities offered by international co-productions adhered very closely to his self-imposed remit to promote Barcelona and Catalan artists and culture and to the theatre's responsibility as a publically-funded institution with a strong sense of civil responsibility. Matabosch clearly understood what was required to ensure the ongoing survival of the theatre to continue its successful track record: the balance of retaining of the Liceu stalwarts and attracting new audiences through a careful managing of both aesthetically traditional and modern works. The balance of these works was spread through a regular link and discussion with Barcelona, Catalan and Spanish newspapers and television to communicate the Liceu's programme, remit and intentions as a cultural institution through the press, whose coverage of cultural institutions is more and more pared down relating their financial situations, complexity and difficulties, rather than circulating their cultural and artistic content. Given this harsh journalistic context, the provision of a positive outlook for the theatre by an artistic director that is familiar with media appearances then becomes paramount.

These mediatic appearances are then complemented by the fulfilment of the theatre's self-accorded informative responsibility to inform patrons and the wider public of its programming schedule and content through the use of informative sheets and hand programmes. These devices cover the dissemination of artistic subject matter in greater detail to the modern cultural consumer, whether local, national or international. The Liceu-affiliated associations such as Amics del Liceu and Actuem pel Liceu proved rapid in their responses to the theatres's times of difficulty (such as during the announcement of the ERE in early 2012) in order to raise awareness and promote the Liceu in a fashion that tries to reinforce the links between city, civil society and theatre. This, to a great extent, as I have shown in the thesis, is the essence of the 'Liceu de tots' programme: a theatre that is at the service of various audiences: the general Barcelona public, the life-long Liceu subscription holders, international theatre critics, concert-goers, in addition to providing a place for international culture to come to Barcelona, and for Barcelona and Catalan culture to be projected to the world. The Liceu is a theatre that strives to make itself an indispensable part of the cultural and personal panorama of the city it serves. Its task of providing a coherent artistic programme that informs the cultural consumers it seeks to retain as return customers forms a relationship between consumer and institution - similar to the Liceu's intended programme of the last century, but adapted to the modern requirements of theatre economics and wider cultural politics. The cultivation of this relationship then bears fruit when the theatre suffers setbacks and difficulties through the organisation of benefit galas with world-famous singers who also recognise the city-society-theatre link as a particularly special one and lend their support to the cause, giving it wider promotion. It is to be hoped that the Liceu's societal link and public relations and communication programme will continue, so that the opera house may continue its function as a cultural node within the

city and carry on providing Barcelona with a world-class opera house that reflects both the city's own operatic and society traditions and also creates locally-relevant productions in the vein of Matabosch during his time at the theatre.

The end of the 2012-13 and the beginning of the 2013-14 season at the Liceu will hopefully close a cycle of poor management and lack of stability. Despite the financial complications of previous seasons, the Liceu and, more importantly, its workers have shown that they are willing to be flexible and support the theatre and what it stands for in terms of its history, pedigree and cultural value. This is provided that the workers are included in the debate around how to best face the issues the Liceu has: this was precisely the issue when the Liceu ERE was first announced and was roundly criticised at the discussion of the Liceu at the Parlament de Catalunya by Glòria Royo and Susana Rodríguez from the Business Committee and by the head of the general Liceu committee, Manuel Martínez. Unfortunately, the fact of the EREs planned for the end of 2013 and in early 2014 remains, but they have been scheduled over the theatre's quiet period in the season after Christmas and the timing has been negotiated with the staff so as to minimise disruption and embarrassment for the theatre.

There have been changes that address some sense of recognition that the theatre was beset by financial and governance difficulties. The removal of Joan Francesc Marco as Executive Director, the inclusion of new governors and the appointment of a new Executive Director through an independent body are important and, indeed, remarkable changes for a Spanish theatre. Such measures would have hopefully ushered in a period of economic stability and continued artistic innovation under Joan Matabosch and new musical director Josep Pons that would have kept the Gran Teatre del Liceu at the apex of operatic innovation and citizen affection in Barcelona, Spain and beyond. A new

artistic director will bring new priorities and an artistic vision that may deviate from that of the Matabosch years.

This thesis has provided a context in which to understand the complex set of circumstances that the Liceu is subject to due to the historical, political and economic factors that affect the institution, as a way of understanding of how the theatre will be able to deal with problematic issues in these areas in the future. This can be achieved by providing knowledge about the historical purpose of the Liceu as a forum of social interaction and projection, and how the theatre can look to that 'stock-holder' period of in its attempt to recoup this function in the current economic context to become, once more, a nexus of Barcelona life. Contextualising the Liceu in this way allows us to understand how historic cultural facilities can combine to their past remit to wider European and international trends to help update their future output to novel forms of dramaturgy, staging and aesthetics; more than this, it allows the Liceu to use this previous knowledge to become a factory of modern, locally-relevant culture and an example of efficient cultural management with the freedom from political entanglement and influence so common to Spanish cultural institutions.

There is a tangible sense that this is a time of profound change for the Liceu, and there has been plentiful criticism of the theatre's dealing of recent events and of the new 2013-14 season programming.³⁶³ Articles concentrate on the theatre's ever-decreasing budget, and the head of the Gran Teatre del Liceu Foundation, Joaquim Molins (who himself works with no salary) has made it clear that the reduced budget has caused problems in the search for a new artistic director;³⁶⁴ he cites that many artists that

³⁶³ X. Cester, 'Reconstruïem el Liceu?', *Ara*, 29 September 2013 <http://www.ara.cat/premium/cultura/Reconstruim-Liceu_0_1001899859.html> [accessed 10 February 2014]

³⁶⁴ X. Cester, 'Joaquim Molins: "Molts candidats han desestimat dirigir el Liceu pel salari"', *Ara*, 7 October 2013 <http://www.ara.cat/cultura/Joaquim-Molins-candidats-desestimat-Liceu_0_1006699460.html> [accessed 10 February 2014]

perform at the Liceu do so for the prestige since the theatre offers below market pay. Arguably Matabosch's departure marks a severe downturn in the Liceu's fortunes: the continual funding cuts at national, regional and city level have effectively robbed the theatre of any ability to attract the best names in opera to maintain its standing.

The Liceu no longer seems as transparent and city- and society-orientated as previously – the poor leadership and internal wrangling of Joan Francesc Marco's period as executive director have taken its toll. The fact of a two-month closure for an ERE during the Liceu's most profitable months (June and July) in 2014 is the latest in a series of problems that have negatively affected the theatre, including those described in Chapter 3, and the distress of the workers due to the various EREs and the very public announcement of the theatre's problems has been something of a public relations disaster for the theatre. The *Actuem pel Liceu* platform's efforts to relink the theatre to the public have been frustrated by the management time and time again. Joaquim Molins suggested that the time of the 'Liceu de tots' has passed.³⁶⁵ Rather than implying that the Liceu has returned to the exclusivity of the pre-fire days, Molins seems to be hinting at a loss of implication from within the theatre, a lack of dedication to maintaining the societal link that had been so heavily promoted in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Even when speaking of the incorporation of Matabosch into the Real team, the late Gérard Mortier noted that although the former might be the best-positioned of the three possible candidates to work at the Real (the others being Antonio Moral, Mortier's predecessor at the Real and Pedro Halffter, the artistic director of Seville's Teatro de la

³⁶⁵ X. Cervantes, Joaquim Molins: 'Em temo que aquell esperit de la campanya "El Liceu de tots" s'ha perdut', *Ara*, 13 October 2013 <http://www.ara.cat/premium/cultura/Joaquim-Molins-Em-campanya-Liceu_0_1010299031.html> [accessed 16 February 2014]

Maestranza), he argued that the work Matabosch had done to incorporate novel works into the Barcelona repertoire was largely incompatible with the conservatism of Madrid musical and operatic circles.³⁶⁶ The eclecticism of Matabosch's work over the last decades in Barcelona was ill-suited to the kind of work that Mortier had been doing in Madrid. In addition, he noted that bringing Matabosch to Madrid would severely damage the Liceu's own project, underlining the former's importance to the Liceu:³⁶⁷ although executive directors may come and go, Mortier seems to be hinting that Matabosch was key to the Liceu's ongoing survival. Indeed, whether he is able to apply his formula that was so successful in Barcelona to a theatre like the Real is yet to be seen – his wise combination of novel operas and more restrained, conventional productions allowed him to be seen as an innovator who respected the lyric traditions of the Liceu, allowing the theatre to evolve artistically and slowly, rather than dramatically changing the entire programme in a few years.

Furthermore, Matabosch's activity as president of Opera Europa and his participation in singing competitions gave the Liceu prestige and international presence and visibility. In conjunction with his development of the genre at the *coliseu* has earned the city the reputation of being a European centre for quality traditional and contemporary opera, able to attract stellar international talent and co-produce operas with other high-level opera houses and create their own exportable productions.

It is early to say what will augur for the Liceu's future: Matabosch's defection may prove to be disastrous for the Liceu and it could be difficult to restore the theatre's

³⁶⁶ D. Verdú, 'Mortier: Si el Gobierno impone a mi sucesor, no esperaré a 2016: me voy', *El País*, 3 September 2013
<http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2013/09/02/actualidad/1378150163_102238.html>
[accessed 14 February 2014]

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

reputation given the very public problems it is suffering. The planned summer EREs, below-market pay for artistic director as evidenced in the articles above, relatively poor reviews of the productions thus far this season, overdependence on two or three operas and the announcement of plans to focus energies on tapping into the tourist market are evidence of the theatre's difficulties, all of which are exacerbated by the complex and unstable nature of the Liceu's management structure. The measures described on page 189, of a re-structuring of the Liceu to make a more transparent theatre, freer of influences than now, could be a step forward in re-energising the Liceu.

Matabosch's time at the Liceu will very likely be seen as a specific period of innovation for the theatre, of attempting to widen the potential demographic of the Liceu to bring it closer to the people of Barcelona by seeking out a mixture of unusual, or rarely-staged operas to enlarge the Liceu's repertoire, completely new productions and restaging Liceu classics to diversify the theatre's programme. In broadening the appeal of the Liceu, Matabosch hoped to further restore the previously close link between opera house and city (or civil society) through the re-creation of the Liceu brand so that the Liceu was once more a representative of the city – this time more egalitarian, less strongly stratified. As I have shown in this thesis, the brand proved successful in the first decade of the 21st century; how it develops through the vision of a new artistic director and the challenges posed by government funding cuts and a precarious economic climate, remains to be seen.

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