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THEATRE SPACES IN BARCELONA, 1800-1850

Gabriel Sansano

My work attempts to delve into the characteristics of different playhouses or theatrical spaces that existed in Barcelona that were supported and frequented by the emerging artisan middle class. With this in mind, I propose, on one hand, to outline the theatre context that explains the Teatre Principal's hegemony during the first third of the century, and in parallel, show how this theatre coexisted with different amateur spaces. I will also explore in detail two sites, the Teatre dels Gegants and the Teatre Nou, attempts to create professional spaces catering to emerging social classes distinct from those of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. In the process, I will contextualize the social, political, and economic evolution of Barcelona society, which was the driving force of social change; in particular, I will focus on political change, especially in relation to the Liberal Revolution.

I am interested in particular spaces in a city that experienced very significant demographic growth between 1790 and 1850 (Fàbregas 1975, 20-22). Although statistics differ from source to source, we can safely say that by 1800, the city had well over 100,000 inhabitants; but with the War of Independence (1808-1814), the Liberal Triennium (1820-1823), and certain circumstances related to public health (e.g. the yellow fever outbreak of 1821), the population then dropped, and by 1826, it barely topped the level it had reached at the start of the century. Even so, by 1848 Barcelona had more than 173,000 people, and by 1857, more than 190,000 (López Guallar 1997, 3; 2004, 69-71).

Although it is true that in 1821 the city began to spread towards the neighbouring town of Gracia, it was a demographic expansion that was concentrated within the city walls and in its suburbs until 1854, since the walls did not begin to come down until that year. This circumstance led to a very high population density, while at the same time the pace of life and social relations in the city changed and accelerated, "became industrialized" (with the foundation of large industries and financial entities, constant immigration, etc.). Such a concentrated degree of humanity and the new labour relations demanded leisure spaces that, since at least the last third of the previous century, had been growing and diversifying significantly.

Teatre de Santa Creu and theatrical spaces up to 1835

As is well known, theatrical activity was subject to operation by monopoly. Since the latter third of the sixteenth century, theatrical performances were privately managed by the administrators of the charity hospitals of every major city that applied for the privilege. In Barcelona, through a right granted by Felipe II (1579), the administrators of the Santa Creu Hospital applied for and received a licence to build a playhouse (the Teatre de Santa Creu), which, well into the nineteenth century, and in the face of competition from other spaces, came to be called the Teatre Principal. Thus, as of 1599, they had an enclosed building designed for the public and for acting companies, and thanks to their monopoly, they had the authority to permit—or not—performances in any other space in the city, and to demand a fee (Artís 1938, 62–63; Suero Roca 1987, vol. 1, 29–44).

Despite the control exercised by hospital administrators over plays all across the city, it is not difficult to find evidence pointing to the existence of regular performances in various buildings, streets, and plazas. Perhaps the oldest notice of these shows comes to us from Rafael d'Amat, Baron of Maldà, in his *Calaix de sastre* (1769–1819), on which Francesc Curet (1935) relied heavily in his historical study of Catalan theatres. Curet, based on Maldà's testimony accompanied by the meagre press of the period (the first years of the *Diario de Barcelona*, founded in 1792), notes the stable existence of some twenty stages, which were organized into three categories: (a) the theatre of aristocrats, gentlemen, and the wealthy bourgeoisie; (b) the theatre of the artisan class; and (c) plays in schools and religious convents (57–88). García Espuche (2009) also makes note of it, in his map of eighteenth-century ball courts (where games similar to racquetball or handball were played), when he points out that some of these were used for diverse shows or entertainments (47 *et passim*). A notice from 23 March 1783 confirms it: "Calle Escudillers, en una casa que llaman del Juego de Pelota de Pagés se representan casi diariamente comedias de santos y pasages de la sagrada escritura por una compañía de titiriteros"⁵⁷ (Ms. 344). It must be concluded that these shows were for the lower classes.

Already by the end of the eighteenth century, these informal or subaltern shows clearly caused a decrease in income for the Teatre de Santa Creu and, faced with the different types of competition that arose, the hospital exercised its privilege, to the point of obtaining a royal order on 19 March 1790 that prohibited presenting plays in private homes, and holding dances or other entertainments in private or unoccupied spaces such as empty apartments or warehouses (Artís 1938, 544; Suero Roca 1987, vol. 1, 43–44).

Given this royal order, it is worth emphasizing two aspects: first, the playhouse had burned down in October 1787, and during its reconstruction, a nearby warehouse had been refurbished as a smaller theatre space. Second, the hospital administrators (from religious orders, or people subject to them) used rental contracts to supervise the repertoire chosen by the manager, and censored the staging of the different plays, dances, etc. It is evident that this control limited the updating of theatrical tastes. Aviñoa reminds us: "a través del escenario la ciudad entra en contacto con lo foráneo y, en cierta manera, se regenera culturalmente gracias a ello; poca vida podría tener un teatro que solo se nutriera de sus propias fuerzas"⁵⁸ (1990, 139). Likewise, it is worth considering that the minimal capacity and conservative (and often repetitive) nature of the playlists encouraged the creation of alternative, generally more domestic, spaces.

Finally, although the testimony of Arthur Young (1787, 67) has frequently been cited to show the coexistence of different social classes in this theatre, the fact is that the lower classes (artisanal first, and incipient middle class later) had seen the gradual reduction of the areas they were assigned to in the theatre (unpaid benches or parterres, standing-room-only areas in front

of the stage) over the first third of the nineteenth century (Artís 1938, 167), and they sought alternatives in other private or semiprivate spaces, of a type more in line with their tastes or economic means.

Everything leads to the conclusion that, as of 1800, these alternative theatre spaces became "permanent." Thus, in addition to the spaces belonging to the guilds or associations, there were also habitual sites on Tripó Alley, on Plaça Sant Just, on Jonqueres Street in a place called a "salón de variedades" [variety hall], in the Templars Palace (also called the Palau), on Sant Oleguer Street, Mercaders Street, and in the Can Clavell warehouse on Plaça dels Gegants, as well as some others, not to mention the "portable theatres" based in peoples' homes.

These were practices and spaces that grew especially after 1820, and in them masked balls during Carnival alternated with academies and variety shows (kites, ventriloquists, sleight of hand, nativity scenes, etc.) (Amades 1933). The most regularly used sites were the one on Jonqueres Street and the one on Tripó Alley. The latter was a place of business that is repeatedly mentioned after the start of the nineteenth century, about which we have only the vaguest of notices that almost always reflect a very poor, vulgar opinion of the place:

Estava situat al tercer pis (...) L'escenari era permanent, i el que en diríem sala d'espectacles contenia cinc llotges i bancs per al públic. Era el lloc preferit pels cupellans i religiosos que no creien decorós assistir al Teatre públic (...), es veu que hi actuava tothom que volia llogar-lo, sense distinció de classes i d'estaments.⁵⁹

(Curet 1935, 94–95)

This progression of spaces could be considered the first attacks against the hospital's monopoly or exclusivity, which it continued to include in the Teatre's rental contracts and to defend against any interference. As is well known, after the Constitution of 1812, Decree 262 of 8 June 1813 established freedom of industry in Spain, which, although brief, was reinstated in 1820 and definitively in 1836. The end of the guilds and the freedom of profession and of commerce granted, by extension, to any person the right to open a new theatre or put on shows away from the Teatre de Santa Creu. In spite of everything, the hospital continued to defend its privileges before all possible parties: the City Council, the military governor, the Captain General, and even the King. For its administrators, given the fluctuations in the application of regulations regarding freedom of industry, nothing had changed with regard to its exclusivity, which now had nothing to do with monopoly rights, but rather, with the public utility that its privileges generated for the hospital's patients (Artís 1938, 554).

While this 1813 law is important for our discussion here, the royal decrees signed by the reigning queen on 23 and 30 November 1833 are no less so (*Gazeta de Madrid*, 28 November, 10 December, respectively). The former put an end to the mourning period for the king's death (which occurred on 29 September), and the reopening of theatres and other public entertainments was authorized. With the latter, the delegates to each province's Ministry of Development were named (both the positions and the provincial division were newly created) and were instructed in their functions, detailed in an addendum. Chapter 14 relates to "Theatres and Shows":

57. Los teatros exigen con urgencia un arreglo que los saque de la situación deplorable en que se encuentran. ... los Subdelegados de Fomento harán lo que puedan para mejorar el de sus provincias respectivas, a lo menos en lo relativo a las piezas que se representen, ya que sea imposible hacerlo en cuanto a la ejecución, puesto que apenas hay entre sus actores uno u otro que posea los elementos primeros de su arte ... animar

á los literatos de su territorio a enriquecer la escena provincial con composiciones que la varíen y amenicen, que estimulen la aplicación y favorezcan la concurrencia.⁵

(Niem 1835, 381)

There are two regulations whose relevance for the royals is difficult to understand, if we forget that the first Carlist civil war had begun a few weeks earlier, in October. The Delegates of Development acquired very specific functions pertaining to serving the rights of the future Queen Isabel II, and the theatre had to be protected, encouraged, and subordinated to the needs of liberal, or Isabeline, ideals, as well as serving as an amusement and social decompression for the population in times of war. As much as or more than freedom of industry, this decree (and its later developments) was the wall into which the hospital crashed in its demands for the protection of its monopoly. The new political climate favoured the appearance of new playhouses and new theatrical producers (sometimes the actors themselves).

Theatrical scene and political scene, 1808–1835

But the subordination of the theatre to the political scene went back several years. Perhaps never before war against the French had the theatre been used, with such intensity, as a weapon of political propaganda by one faction against another. Beginning with this conflict, the stage, along with the printed page, became the customary space from which to rally one's supporters and attack one's opponents. The dramatic pamphlets that, in the beginning, served to combat a "foreign" enemy (the French), were later promoted to attack the supporters or detractors of the Constitution, of Carlos María Isidro, of the Regency, or of the rights of succession of Fernando VII's daughter. Studies compiled by Caldera (1991) offer evidence of this. In this volume, Francisco Lafarga presents a catalogue of Spanish political theatre between 1805 and 1840 that includes 315 plays (167–251), and among 205 titles that he locates and ties together, some twenty are printed in Barcelona. If we consult the listings created by Suero Roca (1987–1997), many of the works catalogued by Lafarga appear on this list as being presented in the Teatre de Santa Creu. As Pere Anguera notes: "La consolidació del diàlegs o converses com a eina de divulgació política es produí a Catalunya durant la guerra del Francès, i la dels sainets en el Trienni Liberal"⁶ (2004, 9).

With respect to Barcelona, this assessment is interesting because it helps us better understand the liberals' interest in the stage, in celebratory spaces, and spaces of sociability in general. As Anguera highlights, they lacked religious supporters who might spread liberal ideals from the pulpit (as their opponents most certainly did), and "En dominar les ciutats, els liberals tingueren més a l'abast la possibilitat d'encarregar textos, formar companyies per representar-los i impulsar-ne, si obtenien un èxit notable, l'edició"⁷ (2004, 10). The theatre thus became an urban foxhole from which to combat absolutism. This relatively new, and in the beginning completely urban, political, and propagandistic facet would successively receive de facto "supervision" during the various periods of confrontation that could be civil or, as of 1822, clearly ominous: by the local magistrate at one time, and later by the Delegates of Development; but in all cases, by the political leader of the time (Quintana 2016).

In this context outlined by Anguera, we find some other studies on the Liberal Triennium in Barcelona to be quite pertinent, especially those that analyse the projection of liberal ideology specifically onto the urban sphere (Roca Vernet 2013), its parties and celebrations from the space of the City Council, to popularize and entrench the liberal symbology and *liturgy* (Roca Vernet 2016). In this sense, the role of the town councils and their immediate superiors was decisive in promoting a resignification and popularization of the new liberal values and referents. This

more short-lived impulse would be apparent during the Liberal Triennium, and would become more consistent and determined as of 1833, during María Cristina's Regency. Thus, as well as the customary calendar of plays (Carnival, Easter, the eighth day of Corpus Christi, Christmas celebrations, etc.), there was a special insistence on organizing *ad hoc* parties on dates significant for liberalism: 19 March (passage of the Constitution of 1812), 24 September (convening of the Courts of Cádiz), 13 July, etc. As Roca Vernet notes:

la popularidad de las fiestas cívicas durante la Revolución Liberal se fundamentó en la acción de los consistorios municipales de estimular mecanismos y gestualidades de la alegría aprendidos cuando los ciudadanos eran súbditos del monarca y reinterpretados en los nuevos ceremoniales liberales.⁸

(2016, 74)

Among the various initiatives to stimulate civic gestures, we can see a clear example in the area of dancing during Carnival or at masked balls, which were quite popular in Barcelona in those days. Although it is true that these celebrations and festivals had been deeply rooted in the culture since the eighteenth century (Curet 1935; Artís 1938; Aisa 2011), it is no less true that the liberal authorities placed a special emphasis on them, and a proselytizing permissiveness to attract the support of heterogeneous social sectors. In this regard, we must mention the animated dances at Antonio Nadal's warehouse, also known as "La Patacada," at which the bourgeoisie rubbed elbows with the artisan classes (Artigues, Caballé; Tajer 2013, 67; Roca Vernet 2016, 77 and 80). The numerous extant applications to hold private dances and soirees, in the homes and warehouses of different social sectors, confirms this.

Teatre de Santa Creu ~ Teatre dels Gegants, 1820–1821

Among the various attempts to establish a new, more or less stable public theatre during the Triennium are included the initiatives of some actors such as Agustín Llopis and Felipe Blanco (Artís 1938, 547; Suero Roca 1987, vol. 1, 38–41). But the only one that seems to have endured is the so-called Teatre dels Gegants. This was located in the "Can Clavell" warehouse, in Plaça dels Gegants (behind the city hall). In fact, Suero Roca discusses in detail the tempestuous relationship between the Teatre de Santa Creu and the Gegants, both in the chapter dedicated to theatre's exclusivity (vol. 1, 38–40) and when she analyses the former's business conduct between 1820 and 1830 (vol. 1, 173–177). This researcher notes that there were not any very great differences between the show schedules of the two theatres, although there certainly were between the conditions of a true theatre and a more or less repurposed warehouse (40).

The Teatre dels Gegants opened for business on 19 October 1820 (Suero Roca 1987, vol. 1, 38, n. 29). On the 18th, the *Diario de Barcelona* announced: "La compañía Dramática Española [sic], dará principio á sus funciones mañana jueves; los señores ó señoras que quieran abonarse acudirán al Teatro Plaza de los Gigantes, almacén de Clavell."⁹ The initiative began with a cast of actors, led by the actress María Antonia Perales. This space had every intention of offering a full season, which was why the aforementioned subscriptions were offered and the warehouse had been renovated with a general entrance, loges, and balconies.

A cursory reading of the two listings (of the Teatre de Santa Creu and Teatre dels Gegants) allows us to confirm some details. As Suero Roca had already noted, the general nature of the titles staged was similar (late Baroque works, melodramas, translations ...), with the more complex ones in the theatre building and those requiring less staging in the small one (or in both). The two spaces also shared a taste for one-act farces. What did differentiate the established

theatre was its ability to stage operas and other musical plays (it had some musical directors on its staff), while the newer theatre never dared anything more complex than some ditties or duets. On the other hand, the Teatre dels Gegants was characterized by its schedule of daily dances (boleros in various styles—zorongo, la Tirana, la Marica—fandangos, etc.), which the Teatre de Santa Creu copied.

Even so, the Gegants company led an ephemeral, hit-or-miss existence, and in mid-1821, it closed its doors and the property was auctioned off (Suero Roca 1987, vol. 1, 173–177). Its brief existence appears to have been basically dictated by two aspects. The first was its status as a warehouse converted into a modest theatre with limited capacities (for both stage and audience), which consequently limited its economic possibilities. The second was the odd alliance of interests between the hospital administrators, the director of the theatre, and the City Council, which closely monitored the Teatre dels Gegants, despite the fact that Perales' company had been blessed with a kind of approval or tolerance on the part of the Captain General (Suero Roca 1987, vol. 1, 40). It was a difference of opinion between the higher authority and the municipal one that was difficult to understand.

It is true that, since the second half of the eighteenth century, the city government had shown interest in supervising the city theatre, in making itself visible as a representative authority, an attitude that had cost it more than a few run-ins with the Santa Creu Hospital administrators (and at times with the Captain General himself). With the arrival of the Liberal Triennium, faced with freedom of industry and the repeated applications to open new theatres, the City Council submitted an application to allow these, should they be tolerated, to always have the necessary municipal authorization. Perhaps all of this might justify the confluence of interests between the hospital administrators, the theatre's director, and the City Council.

On the other hand, when the Teatre dels Gegants opened its doors, it announced itself as "the National Theatre of Giants Plaza." In other words, the Spanish company acted in the Santa Cruz, but the Gegants was a "National Theatre." Given the modest condition of the site, could the appellation "national" be understood as supporting the Liberal Revolution's cause? If this were so, one might think that, from its opening day, on one hand it devoted itself to the liberal cause, and on the other, and no less importantly, it set itself apart from the Teatre de Santa Creu (which came to be called the Teatre Principal), traditionally a forum for the aristocracy and with a decidedly conservative bent. Something of this must have been the case (or the political circumstances of the country were changing), because two weeks later, on 6 November, the theatre's Spanish company (which was called this to differentiate it from the Italian company or the opera) was announced as "the national dramatic society." And three weeks later (26 November), the Principal, which offered two shows that day, stated in the first show's programme that after the comedy: "se cantará la canción patriótica del *Trágala*" [the patriotic song *Trágala* will be sung], and in the second show's programme: "En el intermedio los primeros actores de la sociedad dramática nacional recitarán unas poesías análogas á las actuales circunstancias, y en seguida cantarán el himno patriótico de *Libertad, libertad sacrosanta*."¹⁰ The dramatic company, which had continued with its designation of "Spanish," as of that day would come to be called *national*. The following day, the theatre repeated the formula of the patriotic songs. On the 28th, the Teatre dels Gegants, after the comedy, announced that "patriotic folk songs will be sung." Perhaps by pulling on this thread and with a broader analysis, we can come to understand the difference between the two authorities (municipal and Captain General), without forgetting that other, personal interests might also exist.

As Anguera noted, the liberals used the theatre for their objective of popularizing the liberal cause and, in general, facilitated the opening of new spaces, but this, at least in Barcelona, ran up against the reluctance of the City Council to open new halls that it did not control. In

view of the projected subscriptions for the new Teatre dels Gegants' season, we must infer that it was frequented by more modest classes, which were also undoubtedly ideologically diverse. Furthermore, we must not forget that in these years, theatre and music, that is, staged music, went increasingly hand in hand, and the theatrical fever that spread rapidly had as its epicentre musical theatre or opera. And it is also here where the company's business resided. Without being able to offer these kinds of shows, and under the strict control of the municipality, the future of the Teatre dels Gegants was quite uncertain, as we have seen.

Very likely, in part, as a consequence of the closing of this small theatre and the political climate, during the Liberal Triennium domestic plays continued in several places around the city (warehouses or apartments rented for the purpose, or private homes) and in other small, nearby towns, frequented by spectators from a wide range of social classes, who tried to gain spaces of sociability. This expansion was cut short by the prohibition decreed by the Captain General during the Ominous Decade (Artís 1933, 35–37). After 1832, the control over these kinds of places and plays was relaxed, and amateur plays flourished on their usual stages (Artís 1933, 38–39), until the publication of the ruling queen's orders of December 1834, through which theatre plays were promoted.

The free use of the theatre, 1836–1850

Some months earlier, in July 1835, during the civil war, a *bullanga*, or riot, had occurred which ended (with some rather amusing episodes, such as the burning of the Bonaplata Steam Factory) in attacks on several religious establishments around the city and their subsequent burning, which damaged or outright destroyed them. This same year, regulations were passed to suppress the religious orders, a process that culminated the following year with Mendizábal's state confiscation of church-owned properties. As a consequence of the logistical needs arising from the ongoing civil war, some of the previous Church holdings—Convent de la Mercè, the Convent de Trinitaris Descalços, Convent del Carme, Convent de Montsió, etc.—were used as offices for military administration and barracks for the national militia.

It was due to the troops' desire to have some form of leisure (with the excuse of collecting resources for their daily needs and those of the displaced population) that some officers who commanded the battalions quartered there applied for authorization to perform plays and other small shows in these spaces. These demands were met with suspicion by the Santa Cruz Theatre, although in some places they managed to develop a degree of activity worth reviewing: one of these was the former Convent del Carme, where an amateur company came to perform starting in June 1837. Its shows were announced in the *Diario de Barcelona*: "A beneficio de los actores de la compañía se repetirá hoy el drama gigantesco dividido en 8 cuadros, titulado: *Margarita de Borgoña*; y dará fin con un dúo cantado por la Sra. Ferrer y D. Fernando Martorell"¹¹ (3 July 1837). The following year, the building became the property of the City Council.

The other building was the former Convent de la Mercè: "Hoy se ejecutará el drama romántico en 5 actos y 3 cuadros, titulado: *Catalina Howard*, y para su lucimiento se ha procurado todo lo posible en el aparato escénico y trajes de los actores, según permiten las circunstancias de este teatro"¹² (7 July 1837). The variety of scenes and acts gives us the idea that they were staging more than just minor plays. One space after another was closed that same year on orders from the Teatre Principal's director, who feared the competition from these amateur theatres (Artís 1938, 549–550; Radigales i Babí 1998, 27–29). This "persecution" signals both the fact that the leading theatre was losing its audience, and that these provisional theatres were attractive to numerous social strata. But the only project that prospered and grew was the one promoted by the Sociedad del Liceo Filodramático, located in the former Convent de Montsió and operated

by a large group of businessmen and financiers. It must be remembered that some sectors of the bourgeoisie had attempted to manage and modernize, and even buy, the Principal (Artís 1938; Suero Roca 1987). In the face of the failure of these successive attempts, and taking advantage of the regulations previously referred to, the Liceu Filodramàtic was founded; its success fluctuated in its early years, and before taking the step of constructing a new, modern theatre building on the field of the former Trinitarian Convent, in la Rambla, it attempted to set up shop on the grounds of the former Capuchin Convent.

The inauguration of the new Gran Teatre del Liceu entailed the acknowledgement of the bourgeoisie as the hegemonic class in the city, and a triumph over the Santa Creu or Teatre Principal, which was traditionally dominated by the aristocracy. As Fradera says,

L'evolució del Liceu dins de la vida de la ciutat fou la plasmació més evident de la importància del teatre com a centre de sociabilitat burgesa, i, també, com a plataforma d'ostentació de la seva supremacia recentment adquirida. Les dimensions del nou teatre del Liceu ho exemplificaven a bastament davant de la ciutat, que es passejava i transitava pel seu eix principal, la Rambla. (...) El teatre [Liceu], doncs, acomplia funcions precises: cap endins, reforçava el sentit de jerarquia intraburguesa i de classe respecte d'altres grups socials i professionals; cap enfora, denotava la jerarquia de classes envers la ciutat sencera.¹³

(1997, 334–335)

The history of the Gran Teatre del Liceu, its evolution, and its fully bourgeois nature are well studied (Artís 1947; Radigales i Babí 1998b, among others), and I will not go into further detail on those matters here.

As had also happened with the Liceu, some of these other new spaces were promoted by a diverse group of societies (not always bourgeois) that were continually popping up, all with their respective, heterogeneous goals (Artís 1933, 44–51). These spaces either had their own stages from the start, or they rented one for their activities. A few of these theatres became fairly well known towards the end of the 1840s, given their impact at the time, such as the Odeón Theatre, the Olimpo Theatre, the Barcelona Circus, etc. (Madoz 1846, vol. 3, 539; Balaguer 1865, vol. 2, 37; Fàbregas 1975). Of all of these, I would like to focus on a theatre that I consider relevant to the city's middle classes, set in another former convent: the Teatre Nou.

The new Capuchin theatre or Teatre Nou, 1843–1848

During the Liberal Revolution, the public plaza represented the "expresión del espacio cívico, fue un lugar de encuentro fundamentado en la igualdad de derechos y de la libertad formal de los ciudadanos, y devino el espacio de mediación entre la sociedad y el Estado"¹⁴ (Roca Vernet 2013, 11–12). Hence, one of the most ambitious urban projects during the Liberal Triennium was the creation of a great civic space in which to celebrate liberal ideals and honour the memory of national heroes, one more proof of the new conception of the city. In addition to two other plazas that received significant reforms, the Plaça del Palau and that of Sant Jaume (Roca Vernet 2013), the idea was developed of a broad, open plaza that, once the Santa Madrona de Montjuïc Capuchin Convent was removed, would cut across la Rambla and would be a great urban space for the liberal city.

During the Triennium, the Cortes had expropriated and ceded to the City Council the entire convent, and various urban projects were considered for the use of its site; they even began the process of its demolition (Sola Morales 1985, 1108–1111). With the restoration of

absolute monarchy, in 1824 the convent was reconstructed and returned to the Church, erasing all signs of the reformists. Although the rebellion of 1835 did not directly affect the Capuchins, in 1836 (as a consequence of the suppression of the religious orders) the convent was abandoned and the City Council restarted plans to open a public porticoed plaza on the site. But during these years, devotion to the theatre, and especially to musical theatre, dominated everything, so the plan of building an urban open space alternated with that of building a great theatre on the site, as an alternative to the Principal.

In December 1840, the constitutional City Council opted for the construction of a "teatro y un grande salón de baile" [theatre and a large ballroom], and invited both the presentation of plans and "proposiciones de todos los sujetos que quieran tomar por empresa la construcción del teatro y salón de baile á tenor del plano que se hubiere aprobado."¹⁵ At the same time, it was common for the place to host troupes of tightrope walkers and circus shows etc. and it had its own amateur company that performed in the circus. Given its possibilities for staging, once it was deconsecrated, the space dedicated to the shows was the church itself. The council's invitation received no response at all, and on 23 March 1841, through the *Diario de Barcelona*, they invited "los artistas nacionales á tomar parte en el concurso" [the national actors to take part in the contest] according to the criteria that were set: the new amphitheatre should be a new construction, with a capacity of 3,500 people, and should have all the standard ancillary spaces (storerooms, dressing rooms, a café, etc.), a spacious stage, and a great hall for dances and concerts. Various proposals were submitted; that of the architect Josep Oriol Mestres Esplugas, which incorporated all the spaces required by the City Council (see Fig. 22.1), gives us an idea of the ambition of the project, which was never carried out.

Due to the lack of resources and the political instability of the period (1840–1843)—especially the progressivist popular revolt known as *Jamania* (1843)—the competition remained unfulfilled. In this situation, and with the goal of meeting the demand for theatre, the Council decided to rent the "theatre" for three years, and in 1843, after some more significant construction jobs to adapt it to theatrical use, the theatre would reach a capacity of 1,600 seats (Sola

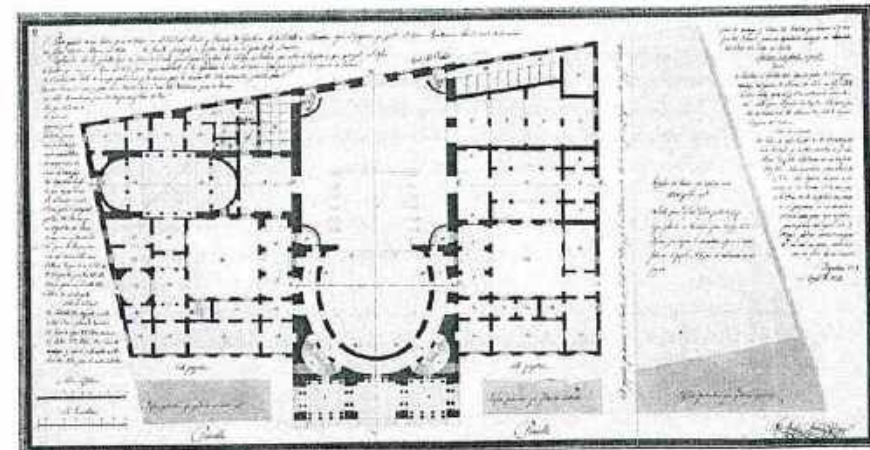


Figure 22.1 Planta general de un teatro ... proyecto presentado por el arquitecto Josep Oriol Mestres Esplugas, 1842.

Source: © Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona (AHCB 06575).

Morales and López de Guereña 1982, 6). Called the Teatre Nou, it opened its doors on 16 April 1843, performed its last show on 30 April 1848, and on 10 July of that year, its final demolition began to make way for the present-day Plaça Reial. The granting of three seasons for the site thus extended to five.

No doubt the best description of the Teatre Nou is Raffaella Perrone's (2011, 39–43), who also repeats Madoz's (1846, vol. 3, 539) testimony:

La forma de la platea es bastante defectuosa, compuesta de una figura de herradura prolongada de 51 pies, 9 pulgadas españolas el diámetro menor, y el mayor de 78 pies. Hay 3 pisos de palcos (con anfiteatro en el primero), cazuela, sin faltar a cada piso buenas piezas de desahogo, particularmente en el primero que cuenta un hermoso café adornado con todo el lujo de que es susceptible, y bastante para la concurrencia del indicado teatro. No carece en todos los pisos de cómodas y aseadas letrinas á la inglesa, y colocadas en puntos bastante ventilados.¹⁶

The Gran Teatre del Liceu was inaugurated on 4 April 1847, and began to take its place as the only model of operatic theatre in the city. At the same time, over the last year and a half, the Teatre Nou company had begun to suffer economically, the theatre had visibly declined, and its debts were mounting (Radigales Babí 1998a, 167–168). The Principal and the Liceu, which were also suffering some difficulties, left little room for a third company if it did not already have sufficient resources (or a devoted public with resources). All in all, we are inclined to think that possibly, during the moderate decade, the interests of the Teatre Principal and the Liceu in eliminating competition converged with those of the City Council, which was susceptible to pressure from them and from the Teatre Nou's creditors (Balaguer 1865, vol. 2, 211; Solà Morales and López de Guereña 1982, 6–10; Radigales Babí 1998a, 162–163). Along these lines, the council took advantage of the Nou's irregular season to carry out the former's plans for urban reform: to close the Teatre Nou and open a large public space. It is possible that the success of the new Liceu received some help from municipal decision-making (connivance). From here, it is easy to trace the steps followed in the demolition of the Nou, the call for the competition for plans (2 May 1848), and the construction of the Plaça Reial. As Perrone notes, it was at this time that la Rambla was established as an urban social and entertainment artery (2011, 35–50), a space for the new bourgeoisie, defined by the Teatre Principal and the Gran Teatre del Liceu, with the new Plaça Reial as the great urban (and bourgeois) plaza.

Although its disappearance and obscurity are almost total, the Teatre Nou deserves to be valued for at least two reasons. The first was already underscored by José Subirà (1946, vol. 2, 25–28) when he noted that operatic productions in Barcelona, with the rivalry between the two theatres, increased notably during the 1844 to 1846 seasons. In the first season:

El Teatro Nuevo prodiga las óperas y el Principal necesita esmerarse en la interpretación de las suyas, a la vez que imprimir un movimiento renovador al repertorio. ... En el año 1845–1846 ambos coliseos, en beneficiosa competencia, dan gran variedad de repertorio.¹⁷

The operatic activity of the Teatre Nou was significant, a fact emphasized by Aviñoa (1990) many years later, and by Radigales Babí (1998a, 168–181), who both placed great value on this musical activity, at least, during those two seasons. In other words, the Nou became serious competition for the Principal and claimed its place in the city as an alternative stage.

The second reason, perhaps lesser known, goes back to the proto-history of the (Capuchin) Teatre Nou, characterized, at least between 1841 and 1843, by an eclectic listing: pieces by Vélez de Guevara (*Del Rey abajo, ninguno*), by García Gutiérrez (*El trovador*), and by Zorrilla (*El puñal del goádo*), together with some translation from French (*Lord Ladvénant*), but especially pantomimic dances or other short pieces or brief pastorals. In the context of such a heterogeneous repertoire, the incipient Catalan scene found a receptive stage that held scheduled shows with a certain regularity. In the playlists for those years we find some bilingual titles by the most popular Catalan playwrights of the first half of the century: Josep Robrenyo (1780–1838) and Francesc Renart y Arús (1783–1853). The former wrote plays about unrest that had to do with the immediate civil war and liberal political propaganda: *Lo hermano Buñol*, *El padre Carnot en Guimerà*, and *Mosén Anton en las montañas de Monseny*. The latter offered very well-known *costumbrista* titles: *Titó y Doña Paica*, *La casa de despesas*, *La Layeta de Sant Just*, etc. These are plays that, together with others by Manuel Andrés Igual (Sala Valldaura 2000), Ignasi Plana, and other lesser-known playwrights, make up the first “repertoire” of bilingual and Catalan *costumbrista* farces in the first half of the nineteenth century. Hence, the Teatre Nou should occupy a unique position in the birth of the Catalan stage (and its audience) during the 1800s.

Finally, we should not forget that the history of the Teatre Nou has almost always been tied to that of the Liceu, and to a lesser degree, to that of the Principal. I think that a thorough study of the companies and the playlists of the Teatre Nou still needs to be done. I believe an *ad hoc* analysis could perhaps provide a complementary interpretation that would help to better understand the evolution of theatre in those years.

Conclusions

As we have observed, the existence of private theatrical spaces in the city of Barcelona was stable and constant, at least from the latter half of the eighteenth century through the first half of the nineteenth. From the late eighteenth-century domestic plays or shadow puppet shows to plays at the Teatre Nou, from recreational societies and the creation and consolidation of new theatres (especially with the demolition of the walls that enclosed the city and the new plans for expansion towards the neighboring municipalities), there was a wide range of options that continued to arise or supplement one another.

Although it might seem that the amphitheatres of the Santa Creu, and partially, the Gran Teatre del Liceu were the predominant ones, we must say that spaces outside the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie proliferated in the heart of the old city in particular, due to demographic pressure from some age brackets (primarily boys and younger men), who demanded spaces where they could spend their leisure time, centred particularly on theatrical activity. The Santa Creu belonged to the aristocracy, between the conservatism and obsolescence of the playlists, changes in the public's tastes, and the reduction in space (benches) assigned to the lower classes; hence, the Liceu was born, *ex novo*, as a space for the new merchant and industrial bourgeoisie.

Furthermore, the use of the boards as a political sounding board encouraged the liberals (first) and the Carlists (later) to use the stage in their attempts to stir unrest and the defence of their ideals, especially in the cities, which were dominated by liberals. Urban reforms also contributed to this, driven by the liberal revolution, which promoted, to varying degrees, the ability of various spaces to be used by some amateur groups for very diverse activities, especially after the 1830s, with the proliferation of various societies and spaces of sociability impelled by not always overlapping political sensibilities.

The incipient middle class, and especially the artisan class, sought and generated alternative spaces that were particular to their social milieu and their tastes. The new hegemonic class, allied

with the declining aristocracy and the new authorities, were marginalizing the new spaces of these initiatives. Romantic sensibilities regarding the stage, and regarding music, contributed significantly to the search for alternatives. It is obvious that the Santa Creu or Teatre Principal always maintained the pressure to preserve its privileges, and attained its objectives, or at least limited the competition until 1835 (or until December of 1834, according to the decree we have seen). The Teatre dels Gegants (1820), the theatres in the former Carme and Mercè Convents, and, to a large degree the Teatre Nou (Capuchin) (1841–1848) fell victim to the schemes of the Principal and to the interests of the new bourgeois class. The appearance of a liberal bourgeoisie and the passion for the musical stage, driving forces behind the Liceu Filodramàtic, ended up changing the course of the situation, fostering, together with social, economic, and political evolution, a change in tastes and the birth of many other theatres that were very active starting in the 1850s. Thus, as Fradera (1997, 335) reminds us, it would not be until the end of this period that we have been examining that, with the bourgeoisie's hegemony and their influence on the State's resources, we could speak of a certain consolidation of a liberal public sphere.

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Notes

- 1 I have applied linguistic consistency by means of systematically providing the Catalan names referring to theatres and other urban place names, even if the Castilian equivalent appears in some documents used. English translation has also been provided when deemed appropriate.
- 2 "Escudillers Street, in a house they call the Pagès Ball Game, there are holy plays and passages from the sacred scriptures performed almost daily by a company of puppeteers."
- 3 "through the stage, the city comes into contact with the foreign, and in some way is culturally regenerated because of it; a theatre that relied only on its own strengths could not survive very long."
- 4 "It was on the third floor ... The stage was fixed, and what we would call the house had five loges and benches for the public. It was the preferred place for the clergy and other religious who did not think it seemly to attend a public Theatre ..., it seems that everyone who wanted to attend was acting, regardless of social class or status."
- 5 "57. The theatres urgently demand an agreement that removes them from the deplorable situation in which they find themselves. ... The Deputy Delegates of Development will do what they can to improve that of their respective provinces, at least with regard to the plays that are shown, since it may be impossible to do anything about the quality of acting, given that among the actors, there may be only one or two who have the barest knowledge of their art ... by encouraging the men of letters in their territory to enrich the provincial stage with compositions that vary and enliven it, that stimulate dedication to the stage and encourage attendance."
- 6 "the consolidation of dialogue or conversation as a tool of political dissemination took place in Catalonia during the Peninsular War, and that of farces [for the same purpose] during the Liberal Triennium."
- 7 "Since they dominated the cities, the liberals had a greater ability to commission works, from companies to perform them, and if they enjoyed considerable success, to have them printed."
- 8 "the popularity of the civic celebrations during the Liberal Revolution was based on the action of the town councils in stimulating mechanisms and gestures of happiness learned when the citizens were subjects of the monarch and reinterpreted for the new liberal celebrations."
- 9 "the Spanish Dramatic company [sic] will present its first show tomorrow, Thursday; ladies and gentlemen who wish to subscribe may come to the Giants Plaza Theatre, Clavell warehouse."
- 10 "In the intermission, the leading actors of the national dramatic society will recite some poetry pertinent to current circumstances, and following that they will sing the patriotic anthem *Libertad, libertad*

sacrosanta." Revolutionary anthem written by Ubariso, *nom de plume* used by Bonaventura Carles Aribau, which was also included in the play *La libertad restaurada* by Ubariso [Aribau], Martilo [Larios de Medrano], Lopecio [Ramón López-Soler] and Selta Rustega [Francesc Altés i Casals], first staged at the *Teatre Principal* on 2 May 1820 and published that same year by the "Imprenta Constitucional de [Juan] Dorca."

- 11 "To raise funds for the company's actors, the epic drama in eight scenes titled *Margaret of Burgundy* will be repeated, followed by a duet sung by Mrs. Ferrer and don Fernando Martorell."
- 12 "Today *Catalina Howard*, the romantic drama in five acts and three scenes, will be performed, and to enhance its splendor, everything possible has been obtained in the way of scenery and costuming, to the extent permitted by this theatre's budget."
- 13 "The evolution of the Liceu within life in the city was the most evident expression of the importance of theater as a center of bourgeois sociability, and also as a platform to exhibit its recently acquired supremacy. The dimensions of the Liceu's new theater were visible to any inhabitant of the city who traversed its main axis, La Rambla. ... The theater [the Liceu] thus fulfilled two particular functions: internally, it reinforced the sense of intrabourgeois and class hierarchy with respect to other social and professional groups; externally, it indicated class hierarchy towards the city as a whole."
- 14 "expression of civic space, it was a meeting place founded on equal rights and the formal liberty of the citizens, and became the mediation space between society and the State."
- 15 "propositions from all subjects who might take on the construction of the theatre and ballroom based on whichever plan is ultimately approved."
- 16 "The shape of the main floor is quite flawed, shaped like an elongated horseshoe 51 feet, 9 inches (Spanish measures) in diameter at the narrowest part, and 78 feet at the widest. There are three levels of loges (with the amphitheatre on the first level) and the 'gods' [the highest-level gallery]. Each level has nice retiring rooms, particularly on the first floor, which has a beautiful café decorated quite luxuriously, and [commodious] enough to accommodate the number of attendees of this theatre. There is no lack on any of the levels of buffets and clean privies *À l'anglaise*, located in well-ventilated areas."
- 17 "The Teatre Nou was lavish with operas, and the Principal needed to put much more effort into their performances, while also adding a more modern direction to the repertoire. ... In the 1845–1846 year, both amphitheatres, in beneficial competition, offered great variety in their repertoires."

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