

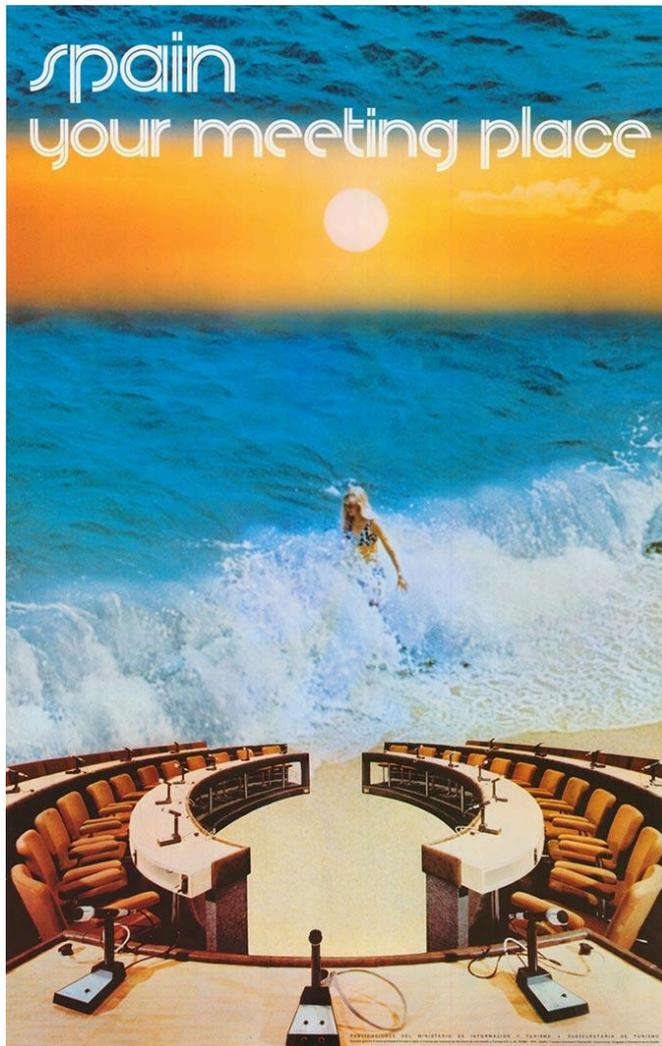
BLUE IBERIA. WHERE SEA AND DEMOCRACY MEET. By Jorge Luis Marzo. Lectured at the Conference "Visions of the Future: Iberian Visual Culture After Democracy 1974–1998", Museu do Design, Lisbon, January 31, 2025. [soymenos.net](http://soymenos.net)

## BLUE IBERIA. WHERE SEA AND DEMOCRACY MEET

To start, I would like to point out that what follows is a summary -therefore, synthetic- of an ongoing research.

In early 1975 -now 50 years ago- the Spanish government's General Directorate of Tourism placed an advertisement in various international magazines aimed at attracting the interest of the academic and business convention industry. Franco died in November of that year.

The image I show belongs to that campaign.



I have not been able to find out who devised or executed it. Only an on-site consultation of the ministry's archives could clarify it. I suspect that it was produced by a foreign agency, something usual since 1970 when it came to promotions for non-Spanish audiences, and which were mostly carried out by English agencies

thanks to the efforts of Manuel Fraga, Minister of Information and Tourism between 1962 and 1969, and then ambassador to the United Kingdom between 1973 and 1975. No matter what, ultimately the campaign bears the ministry's stamp.

It consists of a photomontage of three planes and colors. The shots are divided between a young bather meeting the breaking waves of a beach, a sunset and a modern oval meeting room. Three shades run through the image: orange (in the sunset, the bather and the room), the blue of the sea, and the white of the waves and the sun, which is underlined in the pump typography of the bestline. Under the word "meeting" shines a setting sun.

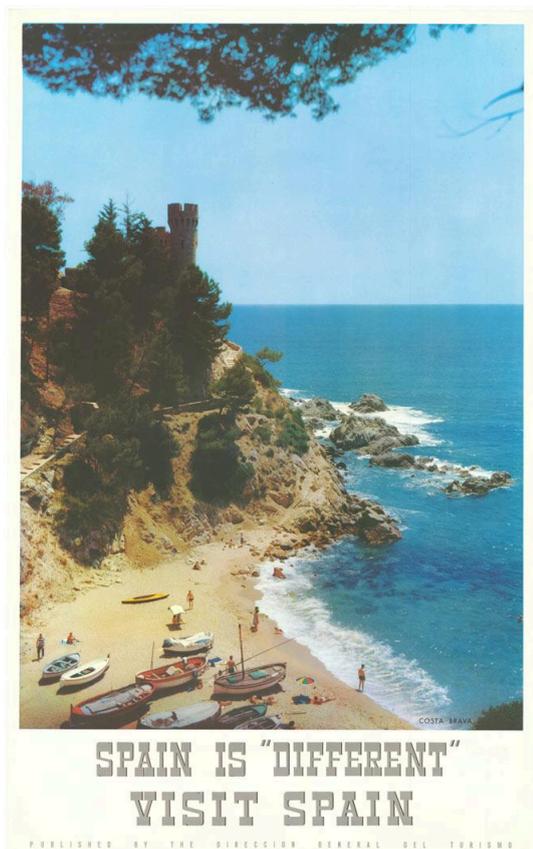
The idea of Spain as the paradise of the meeting gives much food for thought, and would merit an in-depth study of its use in the years of transition. What kind of meetings are held there? The long-running campaign "Spain. Everything under the sun", initiated by the first socialist government in 1983 and lasting until 1990, gave us the following pearl in which half of the attendees at a congress are there to have fun.



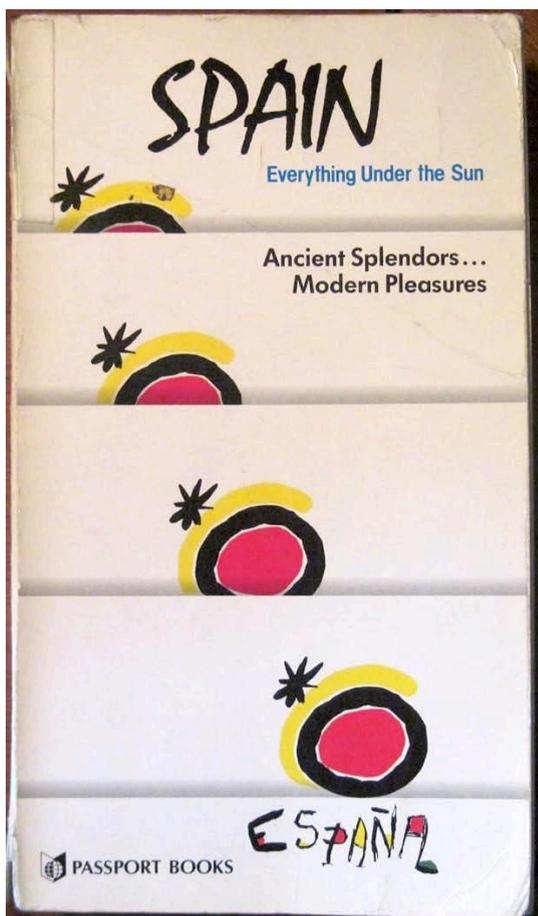
The image invites us to choose: the uniformity of academic black and white, or the joy of color. Moreover, the fact that the bather of the 1975 campaign, the center of male attention, has faded away to become a Goya painting in which two maidens fight for the attentions of a young man, we imagine the young clone in the image, would deserve more comment, but we don't have time.

Why does the dictatorship -that sun that sets- end up in a parliament that slides towards the beach? What is water in the process of political transition in countries with great marine traditions such as Spain or Portugal? What agencies does it make its own?

The sun is, without any doubt, the great asset of the dry national and nationalist landscape, and its repercussions have been numerous over time: "No se pone el sol", "Cara al sol", "Todo bajo el sol". But there is no propitious sun without refreshment. The mutation of the myth of the old heat of traditions into a beach of democratic good vibes made Spain a cool "meeting place" with plenty of refreshment. It also happened during the Franco regime in the 1950s, with campaigns like "Spain is different", full of magnificent beaches but without parliaments.



It is worth noting the role of the sun - no longer setting, but rising - as inscribed in the "Everything under the sun" campaign. Its logo, designed by Joan Miró in 1983, was the first to use an abstract symbol to identify a country. Its success was immediate. A ministry report said the following about its meaning: "Black and red. The skin and the bull's blood. Green and yellow. The colors of Spain from North to South. Meadow and sun. And also fiesta. This is what Miró's symbol leaves us as a legacy: It is the sun. It is Spain"<sup>1</sup>.



That there is no blue in the logo that came to represent the new democratic Spain in foreign eyes is a succulent question. Indeed, there is no blue because it is a right-wing color, linked to Spanish Falangism (also to Portuguese national syndicalism) and other similar European movements. Blue, therefore, had to be presented in a new guise, it had to be a metaphor for clear skies and clean waters, as can be seen in this poster of such dubious taste.

<sup>1</sup> Giulia Quaggio, 2012. "Recomponer el canon estorbado. Pío Cabanillas y la política cultural de UCD". In Darío Corbeira (ed.). *Arte y transición*. Madrid: Brumaria, pp. 208-209.

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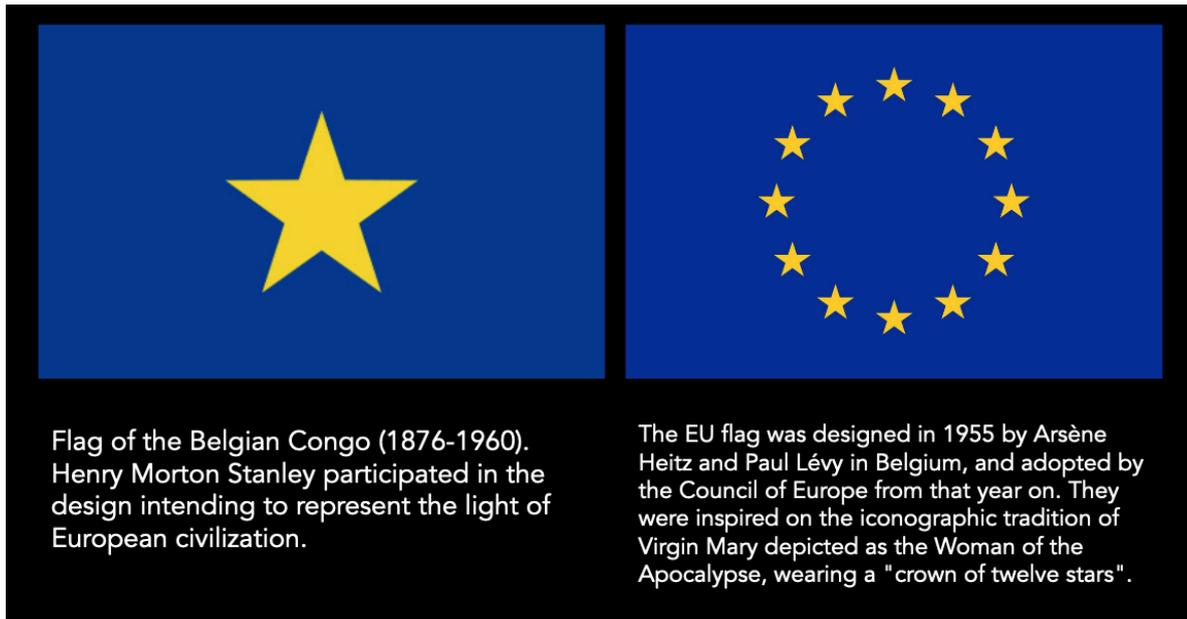


But Miró had also designed another successful logo in 1979, that of a Catalan bank, "la Caixa". The commission from the bank's management to the American agency Landor Associates was to convey a message of "universality and patronage" in a context of banking expansion and political change. Miró was invited to create a work with visual elements that had "graphic appeal". Together with Josep Royo, a textile artist, they created a tapestry that reinforced the bank's link to Catalan craft traditions and the old trope of "Mediterraneanism," but with a casual, innocent form. The result was a guilt-free blue star: It was a kid saving a coin in a piggy bank. The influence of this branding on Spanish corporate design in the 1980s was enormous.



The color blue is loaded with deep semiotics. Associated with the sky and the sea, it is strongly linked to distance, spirituality, but also to clarity and reason. And above all, to wealth. It is the color whose materiality most defines its value. Very scarce in Europe until the 14th century, the traffic of lapis lazuli from Afghanistan, although tremendously expensive and difficult to obtain, imposed its enormous semantic value over that of gold, as can be seen in its restrictive use for the representation of

the Virgin Mary and in royal symbolism. If there is a color linked to European imperialism it is blue, and this is easily perceptible in its central symbols as, for example, in the flag of the European Union (designed in Belgium in 1955 and adopted that year by the Council of Europe), testimony of the first pan-European commercial flag, that of the Belgian Congo, designed in 1876 after the Berlin Conference, in which the European countries divided up Africa.



Europe's imperialist and colonialist pasts have their modern roots in Portugal and Spain. They are memories that are clothed in exploration and technology linked to global extractivism. The sea, in both countries, was deployed as an ethno-nationalist landscape, in which a kind of manifest destiny was put to the test, and which was and still is extensively cultivated in the circles of conservative thought (left and right). The literature, in this sense, is abundant and there is no need to delve much into this now. What interests us here are the iconographic adaptations to which this old trope will be subjected in the period of political transition.

Two explicit windows to watch this are the universal expositions held in Seville (1992) and Lisbon (1998), held to coincide with the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Columbus in America and of Vasco de Gama in India. In both events, the Spanish and Portuguese authorities undertook the elaboration of a costly landscape in which to interpret the role of the sea in the construction of a renewed historical memory, placing it as a pivot on which to trace a contemporary logic of legitimization. In both events, naval memory was written in three inks: exploration, technology, ecology.



Spain's pavilion at the Seville Expo was presented under the title "Harmonies in the Lake", in the form of a cube of clear mathematical significance, conceived by architect Julio Cano Lasso. Let us not forget that the term "Spanish lake" was applied to the entire Pacific Ocean during the 16th and 17th centuries. For its part, the Portuguese pavilion at Expo'98 -whose motto was "The Oceans, a Heritage for the Future"- designed by Álvaro Siza Vieira, was a manifesto on the connectivity of two shores, with surfaces that sought to blend in with the whites and blues produced by the presence of the sea. On both occasions, it sought to reconnect the routes of colonial memory with the new communicational and commercial routes opened up with the end of the Cold War. The harmonies in the lakes served to nicely resemanticize the gigantic disruptions that Iberian imperialism produced in its day and that laid the foundations of modern capitalism. This line has not been abandoned to this day.

EL PAÍS

**Cultura**

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**Ecología y corrientes marinas, la apuesta española para la Expo de Osaka 2025**

El pabellón nacional rinde homenaje a la corriente de Kuroshio, que permitió a Andrés de Urdaneta navegar desde Asia hasta América en 1565

LIBROS · ARTE · CINE · MÚSICA · TEATRO · DANZA · HISTORIA · ARQUITECTURA · CÓMIC · VIDEOJUEGOS · TOROS · BABELIA · ÚLTIMAS NOTICIAS

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In the case of the Lisbon Expo, the Portuguese naval memory was configured through an intense appeal to utopia, woven through the character of the sailor in the face of challenges, among which the challenge of the sustainability of the seas and the lessons of globality that an oceanic nation like the Portuguese could bring, but far from the traditional historicist ones that had dominated these narratives under the Salazarist dictatorship.

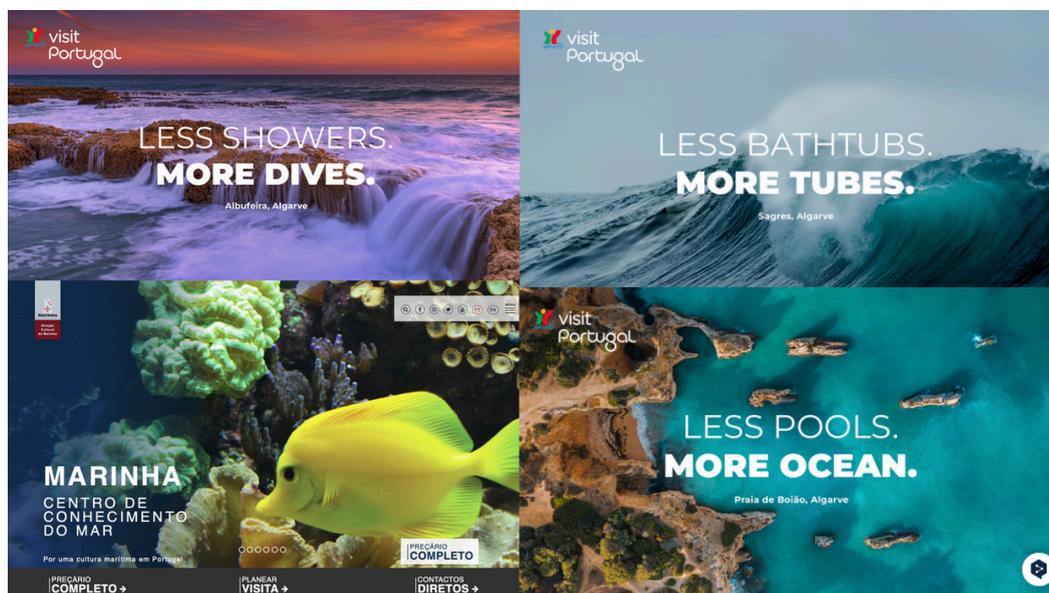


However, a marked organicist profile still prevails in these statements, whereby the memory of colonial exploration was conceived as a biological impulse and reconstructed with a naturalistic narrative. A priceless example of this argument can be found in the design of the Spanish passport. From 2003 to 2015, the graphic motif of its pages played with the map of Columbus's first American voyage and with the migrations of various animal species across the globe. The memory of naval exploration thus merged with a biohistoricity capable of erasing all political materiality.



Spanish passport, 2003-2015

The strong resurgence of liquid metaphors to narrate uncertainty during late modernity soon served to vindicate new currencies and political agencies of the sea. From the 1990s onwards, the exponential increase in transits and trade routes favored a rehabilitation of naval traditions, in turn fed back into the maritime language of digital globalization. The ideas of circulation, access, traffic and liquidity have since become hegemonic. The case of maritime museums is revealing in this regard. Museums in London, Amsterdam, Hamburg, Stockholm, Liverpool, or Barcelona, for example, were renovated, turned into urban icons, their collections were reorganized and their programs were oriented by postcolonial, scientific, technological and ecological perspectives.



This cultivation of the European memory of the sea has borne fruit in terms of heritage awareness, giving rise to the emergence of new ways of water studies now known as Blue Humanities. Certain perspectives have often significant risks, because they ascribe water to an apolitical condition associated with an aquatic universalism that does not bother the old imperialist reasons that still survive in these spaces. The sea, turned into a domesticated element that suffers ecological degradation, adopts in this a double allegory: the maritime merges with the marine to found museums of "natural memory", not far from the assumptions we have seen in the graphics of the Spanish passport.

But it will be on the beach where the aquatic condition is more appropriately defined as a suitable materiality for a society without conflicts, with a liquefied past, and with a desire for wellbeing and integration as Spain was apparently willing to be. The mayor of Benidorm, Pedro Zaragoza, Falangist and main promoter of

tourism on the Costa del Sol in Alicante in the 1960s, was of the opinion that the beach makes no distinctions of class or ideas.



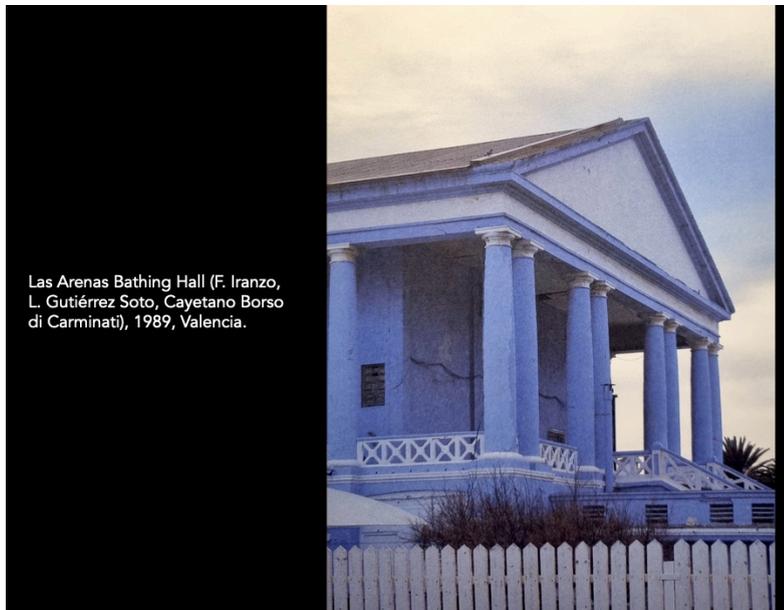
According to the view of Minister Fraga "tourism was the factor that made Spain a new plural and liberated society, presided over by an international and pan-European feeling". In his opinion, it was the beaches of Torremolinos and Ibiza which, with their frenzy, "brought order to the radical and rebellious European and Spanish youth of the 1960s and 1970s"<sup>2</sup>.

This idea was not abandoned in democracy. The blue and golden beach became the space of soft power in which the elites of the regime and the new economy emerging from liberal deregulation became liquid and transparent. The promises of a second home in front of the sea, massive in television and news messages since the 1970s (any prize given in a television contest was a beachfront villa), captured a longing in which social, labor and political conflict collapsed to give way to a blue order that no longer exuded Falangism and old naval traditions, but the vibrant joy of a water capable of massaging and relaxing. Baths, restaurants, campsites and hotels all turned blue. There is an emblematic building on the Valencian coast that embodies these feelings well, the Las Arenas spa (1989), which, as if it were a British hot springs building, is presented to us in the form of a small neoclassical parliament, completely alien to local coastal building traditions. It is at this

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<sup>2</sup> Fernando Bayón (dir.). 1999. *50 años del turismo español: un análisis histórico y estructural*. Madrid: Centro de Estudios Ramón Areces, p. 19. Para una contextualización de este comentario del ministro, ver Alicia Fuentes. 2017. *Bienvenido, Mr. Turismo. Cultura visual del boom en España*. Madrid: Cátedra, pp. 313-317.

crossroads that we must interpret the Spanish government's 1975 campaign that sought to attract the attention of the congressmen, and which opened this paper.



The beach represented the space where the turbulences of the immediate and distant past found a haven. And it was on the beach that the new public space of the transition was modeled. In 1993, the number of second homes on Spanish beaches was three million, with more than ten million people using them, in a country with 40 million inhabitants, that is, almost a quarter of the population. The figure has hardly changed since then. The reason? Saturation point was reached very quickly. It was a space devised for the absence of conflict and in which to represent the defeat of dissension, where citizens endeavor to find, finally, that dreamed-of spot in which to live out their fantasies of official freedom. In 2004, José Camarasa, Benidorm City Council's municipal architect, replied to me in amazement to the question about what the plan for public space was in the town, "The beach! What else?"<sup>3</sup>.

From the 1970s onwards, and for three decades, Mediterranean coasts were filled with the palpable promise of urban and housing developments. Tens of thousands of billboards sprang up on the sides of the roads, at the entrance to towns. They were images of atrocious design, which evidently had not gone through communication agencies and lasted only a few weeks. They always responded to the same pattern: sea views' apartment, a dream in front of the water. From Girona to Huelva, these images presided over what used to be fields, crops and dry land.

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<sup>3</sup> Javier Camarasa, J.L. Marzo. 2004. "Beyond the earth, closer to dreams". In Nuria Enguita, Jorge Luis Marzo, Montse Romani (eds.). *Tour-isms. The defeat of dissent*. Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, p. 188

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Today it could be said that they constitute a single city with no solution of continuity along the entire coastline, only sectioned by the deltas of squalid rivers.



If one of the objectives of this conference is to imagine an alternative archive of design in relation to its function during the political transitions in Portugal and Spain, I believe it is also necessary to deploy it on the memory of this blue democracy through a collection of these promises in the form of real estate developments, images as ephemeral in their modes as they are enduring in their effects. It would be an archive of promise and utopia, just as it would be an archive of disaster and lies, of the disappearance of the natural landscape, of the enormous scarcity of resources such as water itself to which these policies appeal, of the destruction of centuries-old social and cultural memories, of the widespread corruption that the fantasy of living on the beachfront provoked in an important part of Spanish politics and of democracy itself. The ultimate goal of this analysis would be to provide a critical cartography, a geo-iconology, of how the dream of water was processed, and how often ends up becoming a nightmare.



I am finishing. Once, during an investigation on the evolution of political TV spots, I asked the archive manager of a major Spanish political party why they did not keep television campaigns that had been carried out over time. The answer could not have been more eloquent: "Who wants to leave a trail of their lies?". Perhaps that is why it will not be easy to find a type of image resolutely designed to disappear like the real estate promotion campaigns. The initial attempts I have made in some Catalan architecture and urban planning archives have not yielded the expected results. It seems that very little evidence has been left of a design intended to cool a democracy, perhaps a very dry one. We will see in future archives.