The graffiti texture in Barcelona: An ethnography of public space and its surfaces

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Contents

Abstract 4

Introduction 7

Chapter 1: Art and Politics in the everyday life of Barcelona 11

1.1 Introduction
1.2 Locations of the research
1.2.1 ‘El Raval’
1.2.2 ‘Poble Nou’
1.2.3 The Squatters ‘Okupas’
1.2.4 New graffiti relations
1.3 The everyday life in the history of Barcelona
1.4 Public Space and Urban transformations in the city
1.5 Surfaces and Textures of the city

Chapter 2: Visual Cultures 46

2.1 Introduction
2.2 Visualising Barcelona
2.3 Visualising graffiti
2.4 Theorizing graffiti
2.5 Graffiti as art
2.6 Methodology of studying graffiti textures

Chapter 3: Tactile encounters and the ephemerality of the graffiti image 74

3.1 Introduction
3.2 Collaborative street art
3.3 First tactile encounter
3.4 Different ways of making and seeing
3.5 Ephemeral dynamics

Chapter 4: ‘La Carboneria’: An alternative transformation of public space 101

4.1 Introduction
4.2 The building
4.3 The assembly: ways of seeing and socialising
4.4 The texture of corporeal vision: painting of the mural
4.4.1 Around the camera

*Photo essay*

4.4.2 The mural and its somatic plurality
Chapter 5: ‘La Escocesa’: A fabric of images

5.1 Introduction
5.2 Dialogic strategies
5.3 Dialogues between graffiti and anthropology
5.4 ‘La Escocesa’: An Island of freedom
5.5 Making and thinking graffiti
5.6 New forms of spontaneous and anonymous graffiti
5.7 Mural festival in ‘La Escocesa’

Chapter 6: The graffiti texture in Barcelona

6.1 Introduction
6.2 Assembling the graffiti texture
6.3 The street art associations and the council
6.4 Traditional graffiti another layer of the graffiti texture
6.4.1 Is it only a wall?
6.5 ‘Enrotllat’: between the architecture and the street art
6.6 Militant graffiti

Conclusion

Bibliography

DVD Rom: Walking in Barcelona

Words: 62,898
Abstract:

Jaques Rancière (2009b) argues that if there is a political question in contemporary art, ‘...it will be grasped through the analysis of the metamorphoses of the political ‘third’, the politics founded on the play of exchanges and displacements between the art world and that of non art’ (2009b:51). Looking at graffiti and street art in Barcelona as ‘textures’, which stimulate the mind, body and senses. I have investigated what public space means for its inhabitants through the material nature of the surfaces by which it is contained and by applying media devices. This has led me to develop an ethnography of encounters, perceptions and sensibilities linked to political practices and different modes of participation in the everyday life of the city. Following Jacques Rancière’s (2004) conception of ‘political aesthetics’, I argue that the aesthetic of graffiti and street art can be embodied according to different sensible orders in the city.

The public space is key in this process and I see it as an interface between graffiti artists, the general public and the institutions of the city. Graffiti activate the urban landscape through visual and tactile transformations of space through surfaces. These interactions, as De Certeau (1985) claims about everyday practices, may articulate narratives, which became the main source of information for this thesis. Thinking about the graffiti works in Barcelona in terms of Bakhtin’s (1981) idea of ‘the chronotope’, I have recounted the stories, which make the transformation of public space indicative of the everyday life of the city applying practices of collaboration, dialogue and intervention. These practices connected me to different surfaces of the city so as to explore how their material qualities are permeated with social relations and artistically inscribed with historical and political meanings.

Here, graffiti and the city formed a compound of images in which I have studied the ‘visuality’ of graffiti in Barcelona. This, as Hal Foster (1988) argues, encloses at the same time social facts and physical operations (body and psyche) and moves, as I will show throughout this thesis, between dominant and resistance cultures. In short, I have materialized these ideas and images in the graffiti texture of Barcelona, seeing it as a mutable surface, which mediates between different ways of seeing and living in this city.
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The graffiti texture in Barcelona: an ethnography of public space and its surfaces

Introduction:

This thesis is about how graffiti and street art in Barcelona is part of the materiality of everyday life in the city. What is meant by this is that the practice of graffiti and street art involves not only the physical production of particular images on the walls and other surfaces in public space but also ways of looking and ways of acting politically within public space by graffiti artists, local institutions and inhabitants of the city. By everyday life, I mean common daily practices in the city, such as gatherings in the streets, shopping at the local market, people chatting in front of their doors. These everyday practices are full of narratives whose meanings may sometimes transgress the dominant order. As Michel de Certeau (1985) has argued, the modes in which the inhabitants move through the city produces visible and invisible boundaries, which continuously transform the use of the space. I will explore graffiti and street art as a modality of transformation, from the point of view of those who make it, those who engage with it (the public) and those who regulate it, through prevention in the case of the local council and through collaboration in the case of street art associations, art centres and galleries. In short, I am portraying Barcelona from the perspective of graffiti and street artists and will show how their artworks fit within the city’s urban life. Firstly, I will look at how graffiti changes the visual culture of street life. Secondly, I will consider the transformative capacities of the street artworks and finally I will pay attention to the transformation in attitudes towards graffiti and street art.

A set of related conceptual issues based on those transformations are linked to the materials and surfaces used to make graffiti. Here I have looked at different surfaces formed by the walls of abandoned buildings, the walls of squatted buildings and walls managed by street art associations in the city. This diversity of surfaces form part of what I call the ‘graffiti texture’ of Barcelona. This texture is as much about different surfaces and materials within the urban landscape, as it is about relations in the social world. I have studied the ways in which the graffiti artworks were displayed on different surfaces and how people interacted with them. Following Jacques Rancière’s (2004), conception of ‘political aesthetics’, I
have been interested in how the ‘aesthetic techniques’ of graffiti and street art can challenge the city’s sensible orders. In this process, the public space and its transformation appear as key elements of political practices through different modes of involvement and participation in the everyday life of the city. Anthropologically speaking, this is an ethnography of encounters, perceptions and sensibilities, which is important because, as Irving (2008) argues:

‘... given the multiple perspectives generated through different stages of the anthropological journey, we need to ask what might be gained by embracing the flux, contingency and instability of perception, or taking seriously the ephemeral insights and passing knowledge of the successive modes, especially the initial encounter? (2008:155).

The initial stage and encounter of my own anthropological journey in Barcelona was marked by my first visit to the city. It was in 2004, the year that I began my BSC in anthropology at the University of East London, that I travelled to Barcelona in May and spent a few weeks in the neighbourhood of ‘El Raval’, which is part of the city centre district and was at that time in a process of urban renewal by the city council. I was impressed by the amount of graffiti and street art that there was on the walls of this neighbourhood and decided to use this topic in the final practice based project of my BSC’s ‘Visual Culture’ module. I produced a video, which portrayed in a comparative way the graffiti and street art produced in the streets of Barcelona and London. This first experience of the graffiti and street art in Barcelona made me think about the city’s public space and why the inhabitants were able to transform it. Those interventions in the public space life of Barcelona, shaped by vibrant and vivid colours, changed in 2006, the same year that the local council approved the civic law called ‘Ordenanza de Mediadas para fomentar y garantizar la convivencia ciudadana en espacio público de Barcelona’, “Ordinance and measures to promote and guarantee the citizens’ coexistence in Barcelona’s public space”. After this law was passed, the graffiti murals based mostly on collective interventions, a distinctive and particular mark of the so-called Estilo Barcelona, “Barcelona Style”, disappeared from the streets in the city centre (Schacter 2013). I knew that those images were part of the ephemeral and changeable street life of the city and were normally covered over by other artworks or erased, by the local council. However, I also wondered whether these images had
deeper roots and were linked to a particular historical and socio-political background in the city. This issue pushed me to start this research and to study graffiti as an element of public space in the city and its ‘everyday life’, taking into account both its historical and political trajectories and also its ephemeral nature.

In this process, the use of visual media became a key tool for getting involved in the ‘everyday life’ of the city. I have filmed and edited visual material within different contexts such as collaborations with artists and collectives, walking roots and alternative TV channels. This allowed me to participate in different ways of making graffiti and to experience different ways of being in the city. I have edited together this compilation of visual material using the ‘Korsakow’ software. The result is an interactive video called ‘Walking in Barcelona’, which allows the viewer an exploration of the mutable and diverse natures of the city looking at the relations between surfaces, places and people.

The banning of the practice of graffiti in public space since the approval of the civic regulation in 2006 has restricted not only the possibility of producing graffiti artworks but also the possibility of creating an image of the city based on projects that are not commissioned and supported by institutions. How do the graffiti artists from the city cope with this new situation in the city? And how are they painting today? Throughout my fieldwork in Barcelona, I identified different ways in which graffiti was still practised in the city. I also found that the graffiti scene in Barcelona

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1 http://korsakow.org/
was part of complex debates and relationships linked to four general forms of graffiti and street art production:

- **Collaborative:** Graffiti and street art based on collaborations between the council and street art associations such as ‘Rebobinart’ and ‘Enrotllat’.

- **Disruptive:** Ways of making graffiti that contravene the council regulations (traditional graffiti).

- **Antagonistic:** Graffiti and street art that is developed in connection to social and political movements.

- **Commercial:** Graffiti and street art with artistic and commercial pretentions, which is therefore closer to contemporary art and its market.
Chapter 1: Art and Politics in the everyday life of Barcelona

1.1 Introduction

During the mid eighties, what is today arbitrarily called street art arrived in Barcelona from the United States in the form of graffiti, as part of ‘Hip Hop’ culture. Imitating the New York graffiti scene, the first graffiti writers in Barcelona were members of crews such as ‘Trepax’, ‘Los Rinos’, ‘Mafia2 (M2)’, ‘Art (TDA)’ and ‘Rock City (RC)’, who are considered pioneers in the practice of graffiti in this city (Suarez 2011:18). Graffiti crews are based on alliances between their members, who usually tend to paint together under the same name or ‘tag’. They put each other’s names ‘up’ when they are absent, and have a competitive approach to other crews. Throughout the 1990s ‘Montana Colors’ 2, one of the first worldwide companies specializing in the manufacturing of graffiti aerosol cans, was created in Barcelona, giving birth to an artistic and commercial phenomenon called ‘Montana’s Effect’ (Suarez 2011:19). The company’s constitution and products were the result of collaborations between business entrepreneurs Jordi Rubion and Miquel Galea and local graffiti artists Kapi and Moockie (Suarez 2011:19). The company began to promote a relationship that continues today with the creation of graffiti and street art through events and gallery exhibitions in the city. From the 90’s the graffiti and street art scene in Barcelona started to be known internationally and the city started to be visited by the most popular writers and artists, such as Obey (US), Banksy (UK), Space Invader (France), Blu (Italy) and Os Gemeos (Brasil).

By the year 2000, the growth in popularity of graffiti in the city had transformed some of its public spaces into a gallery for these ephemeral artworks. During that time the graffiti artists had unofficial freedom to produce their artworks in the streets of the city and they took advantage of this. In this process, Eva Villazala (2009), the director of ‘La Mono’ magazine, one of the most relevant publications focusing on underground art in the city, highlights the important role of non-Catalan artists in establishing a dynamic and recognized street art scene in the city. ‘Those non-nationals, who came to the city during the years of the street art boom activated the scene, which was a bit stiff. Today, many of them have left, and most

2 http://www.montanacolors.com/webapp/
of those who have stayed have a more commercial vocation’ (Villazala in Sancho 2009). Miss Van (France) and Boris Hoppek (Germany) were two of the internationally recognized street artists who lived and developed part of their artistic careers in Barcelona. As I mentioned above, the council approach to graffiti changed when in 2006, the civic ordinance to regulate the image of, and behaviours in, the public spaces of the city was approved.

According to the anthropologist Manuel Delgado (2007), this new regulation regarding the public space in Barcelona tried to abolish any appropriation of public space without fiscal control and formal authorization by the council (2007: 235). It transformed and coerced the local street art scene towards new forms of graffiti production in the city, which are the central focus of this research. In 2008, the British photographer Jan Spivey curated the BCNXL gallery exhibition at ‘The Smithfield’ in London. It featured artworks on canvas of Barcelona’s front line street art and graffiti artists at the time, including: Debens, elDone, Eox, Flan, J.Loca, Kenor, Klinisbut, Kram, Maze, M.Wert, Mr Kern (France), Sendys, Skum and Zosen. That same year, the Tate Modern commissioned the first major public museum display of street art in London. It presented the work of six internationally acclaimed street artists. One of them was Sixeart, who is originally from Badalona, a peripheral city part of the metropolitan city area of Barcelona.

In this chapter, I am first going to describe the people I met in Barcelona and the places where I have developed this research. I am then going to explore graffiti and street art as part of the history of urban transformations in the city. This will show how ideas of art and politics are embedded in the everyday life and in different imaginaries evoked by the public spaces of Barcelona: from the ‘modernist project’ linked to the urban extension of the city in the so-called ‘Plan Cerdá’, passing through the idea of Barcelona as the ‘Rosa de Foc’ (Rose of Fire) due to the strength of the working class movement and its mobilizations in the city and arriving at the city, as an example of other post-industrial cities under the ‘Barcelona Model’. This will allow me to set out the historical background against which graffiti is produced today. Here I use as the main theoretical tools De Certeau’s spatial and everyday life theory, Habermas’s public sphere theory and Rancière’s ideas of ‘political aesthetics’.
Taking a broad and critical approach to the idea of the public sphere, I follow Seyla Benhabib’s (1992) dialogic conception of the public sphere. She states that ‘the public sphere comes into existence whenever and wherever all affected by general social and political norms of action engage in practical discourse, evaluating their validity’ (1992:87). I see the graffiti made in Barcelona as part of a practical discourse linked to interactions between different aesthetics over public space. It is through this in-betweenness and antagonism of aesthetics that according to Rancière (2004), the politics of disruption emerges and allows individuals to participate in the public sphere (2004:12). Using Bakhtin’s approach to everyday life as a site of struggle between counter-hegemonic languages against a dominant discourse (Bakhtin in McNamara 2014:2). I have approached the public space in Barcelona as a site built by everyday dialogues between the people involved in the practice of graffiti.

Finally, in this chapter, I propose the idea of the graffiti ‘texture’ as a way to study and represent the relationships between sensory and symbolic orders in the city. The historically inflected and sensory relationship between the institutional regulations of public space, and its actual usage, constitutes the general framework in which to explore the practices and meanings of graffiti and street art in Barcelona. This investigation will help to understand the material transformation of public space in the city.

1.2 Some locations of the research

The spaces of street art are also the scenarios for the political-aesthetic representation of the history of the city and its changes and they can be analysed according to the relationship between artists’ practices and everyday practices. Therefore, the street artists and inhabitants of Barcelona from different spaces of the city are the main subjects of this research. The following section describes the diverse spaces, individual artists, and art collective and street art associations that position my ethnographic work in the city.
1.2.1 ‘El Raval’

The neighbourhood of ‘El Raval’, located in the old city centre, was a nucleus of Barcelona’s street art explosion in the 90s and first years of the 21st century. During this period, it was also the object of new regeneration schemes by the local council such as the ‘Plan for Integral Actions’ (PAI), ‘Area of integrated rehabilitation’ (PAI) and plans for inner city reforms called ‘PERIS’, which have transformed the social, economical and environmental characteristics of some of its areas. Indeed, this is an area full of contrast in which tourists, prostitutes, immigrants and its local Catalan inhabitants coexist. Its narrow streets are intertwined with new open spaces, new hotels such as the ‘Barcelo Raval’ or ‘Andante’, and hundreds of holiday apartments. In addition, we can also find the MACBA museum *Museu d’Art Cotemporari of Barcelona*, the CCCB, “contemporary culture center”. and the Humanities Universities (History and Communication) where ‘Culture’ and ‘Art’ are promoted, exhibited and taught.

The urban renewal of ‘El Raval’ shaped by the idea of ‘art’ and ‘culture’, started in 1981 with the urban plan called ‘Del Liceo al Seminario’ (Clotet & Tusquets 1981). The aim of this plan was to create a cultural corridor where people could visit different cultural buildings such as ‘El Liceo, ’ El Conven dels Angels’ and ‘La Casa de la Carita’. The project, as such, was not completed but it fostered important urban intervention in ‘El Raval’ and anticipated the so-called ‘cultural cluster’ and the birth of a new ‘Raval’. The ‘cultural cluster’ urban plan enclosed the construction around the ‘Angels’ square of the previously mentioned MACBA and CCCB, the FAD *Fomento de las Artes y el Diseño* “Arts and design promotion” and later the university buildings.
I argue in this thesis, that changes in the graffiti and street art scene in Barcelona reflect changes in the city's conception of public space within a framework of public interventions and diverse material practices such as the different stages of the urban renewals. In these processes of change, graffiti artists have developed different techniques and strategies according to the different situations that they have faced in the city. Here the materiality of graffiti and street art, through the use of new materials such as stickers, posters and stencils, has become helpful in reducing the risks of graffiti artists’ interventions causing offense for the city authorities. Needing less time to create artworks in public space means that there is less risk of being caught by the police and therefore expensive penalties can be avoided. In chapter three, I provide a deeper insight into this new aspect of graffiti experience in the city through my participation in the project *Haciendo la Calle*, “Making the street”. Here I personally produced ‘posters’ -street artworks- in collaboration with the photographer Teo Vazquez. These street art interventions became the basis of my ethnography of public space. This project offered me the opportunity to play with my position, as an anthropologist as well as a subject in my own research. It required me to cross the boundaries between the observer and the observed and allowed me to learn how street art was produced in the public space of ‘El Raval’ today through performance.

During the nineties the urban transformation of ‘El Raval’ forced the demolition of old buildings and a large number of evictions. The most relevant case was linked to the opening of ‘La Rambla del Raval’, a street in the south of ‘El Raval’, which is 312 metres long and 58 meters wide. To do this, the council had to demolish 62 buildings and evict many of the people who lived in them (Piera 2011). Simultaneously, the neighbourhood became part of the tourist routes and new shops and business were opened. The demolitions and evictions created a temporary urban environment formed of empty building sites and abandoned buildings. The local graffiti and street artists took advantage of this environment to inscribe and integrate their artworks within it. This new material face of the city became a source of inspiration for graffiti artists, a way to develop their muralist techniques and a platform to raise social and political awareness through their interventions. Thus, collectives such as *Ovejas Negras* “Black sheep” and ‘Finders
Keepers’ and street artists such as Tom 14, Kenor, Zosen, Kafre and later on, Jorge Rodriguez Gerada, fostered, through their street artworks, urban interventions and performances with the participation of the area’s inhabitants, alternative dialogues about public space.

1.2.2 ‘Poble Nou’

Another important space for graffiti and street artists, which is also part of this research, is ‘Poble Nou’. The ‘Poble Nou’ neighbourhood, part of the ‘Eixample’ of the city and bordered by the Mediterranean Sea, is a mix of industrial and residential areas that have been transformed and regenerated in the last years due to the 22@ urban plan. This urban plan unleashed social conflicts linked to the eviction of small companies and squatters, who were part of alternative cultural centres and art collectives such as ‘La Makabra’\(^3\). The struggle resulted in a long conflict (almost ten years) between institutions and companies which were in charge of the 22@ plan and a heterogeneous social platform in which neighbours, artists, political activists, squatters, workers and other social actors of the city were involved (Marrero 2008: 58-60).

Chapter five of this thesis, entitled ‘La Escocesa: A factory of images’, is based on my dialogues with the resident graffiti artists of the art centre ‘La Escocesa’ in ‘Poble Nou’. Some of these artists participated in both the creation of the graffiti scene in the 90s in neighbourhoods such as ‘El Raval’ and in the resistance movement against the 22@ urban plan. Today they are recognized artistic figures of the local and international graffiti scene. I shared with the graffiti artists in the art centre some of my fieldwork experiences in connection with other local artists

\(^3\)http://www.laescocesa.org/ca/noticias/comunicado-de-la-makabra
and representatives of the local council. In addition, I also opened up dialogues with them using anthropological examples about art and artists, the city and the space. During these conservations, they also shared with me their own views about graffiti and street art, and their relationship with different materials and contexts in the city. Thus, the studio that they shared in ‘La Escocesa’ was not only the small room where they painted canvases, met up and kept their painting materials, it also occupied a much larger space formed by the walls of the outside patio and those of the abandoned factories around the art centre building. Hence, I approach ‘La Escocesa’ as a laboratory of graffiti and street art in Barcelona, where the resident graffiti artists experimented with new textures, scales and spaces, evolving and adapting their artworks to the new situation in the city.

1.2.3 The Squatters ‘Okupas’

In the process of positioning graffiti and street art in Barcelona, we cannot forget the role of the squatting movements and their influence in different neighbourhoods of the city such as ‘Vallcarca’, ‘Sans’, ‘Gracia’, ‘El Carmelo’ and ‘Ciutat Vella’. They are formed by heterogeneous groups of anarchists, artists and other social and political activists, such as feminists, antimilitarists, ecologists and vegans. Some of these movements use the squatted buildings’ façades and their walls to display collectively produced graffiti murals, in order to openly foster collaborations between artists and interactions with the inhabitants.

In chapter five, entitled ‘La Carbonería: An alternative transformation of public space’, I describe my collaborative experience within the production of a mural on the façade of the squatted building and social centre ‘La Carbonería’. Applying an

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4 I use this term in connection with the concept of laboratorio de creatividad urbana ‘Urban creative lab’ proposed by Marrero (2008) in his anthropology research of the Can Ricart conflict in Poble Nou: a space open to collaboration, experimentation and synergies.
approach drawn from sensory studies, I look at how the mural existed in multiple temporal planes linked to a plurality of individual and collective meanings. The use of my camera allowed me to record (video, sound and photography) the process and interact with the people around the mural. I embodied and represented the practice of graffiti in the space from different positions. Thus, I participated in the creation of the mural as a cameraman in order to document the whole process, and to edit and circulate images through different platforms of communication. On the other hand, I also participated as an anthropologist by interpreting this whole experience for this research.

1.2.4 New graffiti relations

Before the civic regulation of 2006, graffiti and street artists used to obtain authorizations from buildings’ owners or from the people responsible for particular walls in the city, and in this way they informally legalized the walls for the practice of graffiti. This practice is not allowed anymore and the council institution Paisatge Urba, “Urban Landscape”, is the only entity that is entitled to provide these authorizations.

This new situation means that any graffiti intervention in public space needs to be presented through a proposal in order that the formal authorizations can be obtained from the council. This is a long and complex bureaucratic process conditioned by agreements between artists, institutions, private property owners and art associations. Most of the applications for these authorizations are managed and driven by new participants within the local graffiti scene. These are street art associations and art platforms such as Rebobinart5, Enrotllat6 and Difusor7. In

5 http://rebobinart.com/
6 http://enrotllat.wordpress.com/
7 http://www.difusor.org/es/tag/graffiti/
chapter six, entitled ‘The graffiti texture in Barcelona’, I look at the different relations (collaborative, antagonistic, disruptive and commercial) between the different forms of graffiti and street art in Barcelona and how they form part of the everyday life in public space.

After describing the graffiti network within which I carried out my research, in this chapter I deal with questions about art and politics in the everyday life of the city. I argue that these issues are deeply embedded in the history of the city and I present examples to illustrate this. But, before, I will explain what I mean by everyday life.

1.3 The everyday life in the history of Barcelona

The relationship between everyday life, art and politics is addressed in this research through the framework of De Certeau’s (1985) spatial theory, in which individuals’ everyday practices create urban spaces. The practice of graffiti and street art is taken as one of these everyday practices to understand the connection between politics, public space and art. It is through the street artist’s interaction with ‘places’ that urban ‘spaces’ become part of everyday life. The anthropologist Manuel Delgado (2002) defines the ‘urban’ as ‘... a slippery entity that never allows itself to be caught...’ (2002:4). Thus the city’s ‘urban’ life exists upon ‘... unstable structures spread out on differentiated spaces and heterogeneous societies...’ (2002:8). I approach the graffiti in the public space of Barcelona as part of its ‘urban’ life, based on actions, different uses of public space, material objects and imagination (Borden 2001:11). Using Borden’s (2013) words in his study of the city of Los Angeles, I argue that urban life is embedded in the promise of ideal visions of Barcelona – ‘as a place of work and creativity, anonymity and sociability, structure and adventure and history and progress...’ (2013:17).

The history of Barcelona is marked by social and political movements linked to a wide range of ideologies such as nationalism, anarchism and fascism. These movements were partly developed and communicated to the inhabitants in the public spaces through what Temman Kaplan (1992) calls ‘street rituals’. The ‘street rituals’ navigated between the religious and secular traditions, and were performed through official and spontaneous events in public space. They took the forms of strikes, festivals, parades, riots, processions and protest marches. The
streets were the stage of these collective events, and a source of solidarity and resistance. At the turn of the 20th century, Barcelona was the centre of the industrial revolution in Spain, attracting immigrants to work in the construction and textile industries. This allowed for the growth of a dominant bourgeois class and at the same time the creation of a strong working class consciousness in the city: ‘... the street life was a way of knowing and being and the field of social and political struggle’ (Kaplan 1992:16). At that time the city was immersed in a process of modern transformation linked to the modern ideal of a better and more egalitarian place to live.

Throughout this process of modernization in the city, Barcelona artists such as Miro, Picasso and Santiago Russinyol were involved in the social and political life of the city, using the arts for political and social purposes. ‘The Four Cats Café’ (1897-1903), managed by the artists Russinyol, Casas and Utrillo, became the meeting point of Barcelona’s artistic and activist community at the time. The space functioned as a café, art gallery and theatre, and opened its doors to a wide spectrum of art disciplines from avant-garde to popular folk art (Kaplan 1992: 41). Temma Kaplan (1992), in her work ‘Social Movements in Picasso’s Barcelona’, describes how Russinyol perceived the role of the artist community in almost religious terms: ‘Using art to try to direct life in Barcelona toward more spiritual goals, Russinyol attempted to establish it as the secular equivalent of religion, with artists as the high priests’ (Kaplan 1992: 39).

In chapter two, I look at how visual culture and its images are understood as part of social transactions, in accordance with what W.J.T Mitchell (2002) defines ‘... as a repertory of screen images or templates that structure our encounters with other humans beings’ (2002: 175). In this context, I see the city as a visual subject that is both the object of discussion and debate and the contested arena of individual and collective actions in connection with different visualities. I propose that it is not possible to read the graffiti images as discrete works through an analysis of their aesthetics but that we have to approach them in context, within the live environment of the streets of Barcelona. In this way, I will show how graffiti can be connected with the art-history and the visual culture of the city as well as with concepts of public space and the sensory apprehension of the material textures of
the street and its surfaces. This approach draws from the anthropology of art in order to explain the different ways of producing and looking at graffiti in the city today.

Arguably, today’s conflicts between graffiti artists and Barcelona’s city council over the use of public space can be traced back to the 19th century modernist project in the city and the formation of the bourgeoisie ‘public sphere’ and the working class consciousness. At the beginning of the 20th century, the tension between the workers and bourgeoisie fostered the mythology of working class resistance in the city. The city began to be called the *Rosa de Foc*, “Rose of Fire”, and this tension reached one of its peaks in 1909 with the so-called *La Semana Trágica* “The Tragic Week”. This week was marked by popular uprisings and confrontations between the army and the working classes of Barcelona. The aftermath of ‘the tragic week’ resulted in repression and death and life imprisonment sentences given in military courts. Later, the idea of the resistance and strength of the working class in Barcelona was used by the Catalan bourgeoisie and during the time of Franco’s rule, it allowed them to be both outside and inside the dominant power structures (Borja-Villel, Chevrier & Horsfield 1997:117).

Signs of this recent history are visible on the material surfaces of Barcelona in the form of historic graffiti and bullet holes on the walls of the city and its buildings and bunkers, which are being reinterpreted, conserved and brought to life by local inhabitants and institutions. The following story about Pedrola’s historic graffiti illustrates my argument about how the issues of art and politics are deeply embedded in the history of the city and form part of its material surfaces and texture. In this sense, I follow what anthropologists have looked at in the properties of texture, to explore how surfaces can act as a medium in the process of memory construction and the transmission of different kinds of knowledge. A good example of this relationship between surfaces, memories and the creation of knowledge is the anthropologist Shirley Campbell’s (1993) analysis of the texture of the ‘kula’ shell in the exchange of the Trobriand Islands and how the properties of the texture (thickness, thinness, colour or smoothness) are linked to rank, the biography and memory of men who operate the networks.
In 1936, Franco’s coup against the democratic government of the Second Spanish Republic led to a civil war and after it a period of political totalitarianism in Spain. In Barcelona, the coup triggered another ‘popular’ revolutionary uprising fuelled by the power of the anarcho-syndicalism in the city and shaped by libertarian and communist ideologies. George Orwell (2001[1938]) describes, in ‘Homage to Catalonia’, his personal experience of this revolutionary fervour in the streets of Barcelona as follows: ‘Practically any building of any size had been seized by the workers and was draped with red flags or with the red and black flag of the Anarchists; every wall was scrawled with the hammer and sickle and with the initials of the revolutionary parties; almost every church had been gutted and its images burnt…’ (2001 [1938]:32). The workers took control of the city and the transformation of its public space, not only in terms of the material distribution of the space and by changing the street names, but also with regard to the activities and social relations developed within it.

The new revolutionary street names were covered or removed during Franco’s dictatorship from 1939 to 1978. In 2010, however, I read in the ‘El Mundo’ digital newspaper that one of the street names painted by the anarchists on the walls of the city had been found and restored. This case made me think about the ‘story’ of this historic graffiti, what lay behind these letters painted on a wall and how it had finally become restored as part of the public space. In particular, I wanted to learn about the graffiti containing the words carrer d’en , “street of” alongside the name ‘Miquel Pedrola’. Later, Daniel Cortijo, the local historian and expert in the history of the city who had discovered and fostered the protection of this graffiti, explained to me that the graffiti was painted as homage to ‘Miquel Pedrola’, a young local
POUM anarchist who had died fighting on the civil war front. They replaced the original name of the street, which was called ‘San Miguel’ after the catholic saint.

I am using this historic graffiti and graffiti and street art in general as a medium through which to relate ‘stories’ about the city. Throughout my fieldwork, I selected these ‘stories’ as representations of how different graffiti can shape public space. They offer the possibility of exploring how public space is represented in cultural and political terms and embodied at the individual and collective levels. In this process of story making, I have used the ethnographic work on landscape and the Western Apache by the linguist and anthropologist Keith Basso (1984), who made use of Bakhtin’s idea of ‘the chronotope’ to discuss Western Apache stories linked with places. Basso states that the geographic features in the Western Apache landscape are ‘chronotopes’, where their stories and memories make that ‘time take on flesh’ and allow listeners to place themselves in relation to particular features of the landscape, which are charged and responsive to the movements of time (Bakhtin 1981:84, as cited by Basso 1984:44-45). I see graffiti in public space as ‘chronotopes’, where my stories make the everyday life in the city ‘take on material grounds’ through multiple actions, dialogues and participants. The first of these ‘stories’ is focused on Miquel Pedrola’s graffiti and how, throughout the modern history of Barcelona, this graffiti was painted, forgotten, remembered and finally restored and made visible in the city’s public space.

Cortijo first heard about the graffiti when a local journalist told him about its possible existence. The journalist's research took Cortijo on an incredible journey, which began with him walking around and searching for the graffiti across the web of narrow streets in the neighbourhood of ‘La Barceloneta’ until he found traces of it in the corner of a street, and ended up in a meeting in Barcelona with Miquel Pedrola’s daughter, who had lived in France as an exile since the end of the Spanish civil war in 1939 and had never met her father. The graffiti had almost been forgotten by the local inhabitants and the council. It was hidden under layers of painting produced during the intervening years. The overlapping of these layers of painting can be seen as a ‘palimpsest’ with multiple encrypted stories of the time lived in the city space. The graffiti of the anarchist ‘Miquel Pedrola’ is one of them. As Goebel (2004) states in his review of Huyssen’s (2003) book ‘Present past:
Urban palimpsests and the politics of memory, the literate trope of the palimpsest posits ‘... a material site where new inscriptions and half-erased traces of previous historical signs intermingle in a multi-layered cultural ‘text’ that implies voids and illegibilities but also enables readings of rich memories, restorations, and new constructions’ (2004:119). In this sense, Pedrola’s graffiti was not only a name painted on the wall but also a compound of relations, which illustrates how the local inhabitants were involved in public issues within different time contexts. Hence, the comrades and neighbours of ‘Miquel Pedrola’ painted his name on the street wall both as a tribute to him and as a political statement. Then, during the dictatorship regime the graffiti was covered and the memory of the anarchist martyrs was either silenced or they were portrayed as traitors to the fascist Spanish regime. Today this, and other similar historical graffiti such as the Placa del Milicia Desconegut, “Square of the Unknown militiaman”, in the ‘Placeta del Pi’ in Barcelona, have been restored and can be seen in the streets. But what sense of space and what ideas of ‘the public’ are at stake in these restorations and conservations? And whose interests are behind these initiatives?

When I first read about this historical graffiti in the newspaper. I thought that its conservation was a council initiative. My initial idea changed when I interviewed Daniel Cortijo. He made me see how private initiatives could constitute alternative channels through which public matters could be transformed and decided upon. These channels are not well-structured and the results of these popular and private initiatives regarding public space are most of the times, unpredictable. Cortijo explained to me that he had to put in a lot of personal effort to collaborate with associations and collectives of the city and to involve them in his project and circulate his initiative using different platforms of communication. The process was not easy and as he told me:

‘The first time that I approached the Ayuntamiento, “council”, to propose the restoration and conservation of the graffiti, they asked me: Who are you? I told them that I was a local historian who collaborated with different associations in the city... At least I was someone. If I had been just a simple citizen I am sure that they would have not cared about me at all. Later on, I understood what they really meant by the question, Who are you? Firstly they wanted to know if I was coming on behalf of an
association, a political party or someone who they might know and secondly, they wanted to know if I was from la casa “the house”. The house was the council. The PSC ‘Catalan Socialist party’ has governed the city for more than 30 years, from 1979-2011 and for them being from the ‘house’ meant having connections and recommendations ... Practically it was like their own house. I didn’t know anything about this argot but it works like this... ‘.

Afterwards, Cortijo started to publicise the case through local newspapers and he found social support to circulate his proposal in the local neighbourhood associations. This new strategy gave the case a more public profile in the city and accelerated the process. However, it also worked against him when it reached the attention of fascist groups who threatened to erase the graffiti. This shows how the graffiti activated different forms of visuality shaped by political ideologies. Seeing these letters on the wall produced emotions, feelings and social relations that were expressed in contradictory ways. After two years, the local council, through its department of Paisatge Urba, decided to protect and restore the historical graffiti. The recognition was backed up by the Spanish national law, Ley de Memoria Historica, “Historical Memory Law”, approved in 2007. This law establishes the right to apply measures in favour of those who suffered persecution and violence during the Civil War and the dictatorship. It was approved by the socialist government in the Spanish parliament and opposed only by the conservative political party Partido Popular. In 2011, the conservative party won the Spanish general election and achieved a majority in the Parliament. This allowed them to unilaterally suspend the economic budget to support any initiative linked to the historical memory law until today.

The history of the modernist project in Barcelona tells us that the streets were transformed into an arena of public discussions and conflicts. In Gramsian terms, how this process affected the political ‘status quo’ is portrayed as a shift, from a repressive mode of domination to a hegemonic one, based on the official bourgeois ‘public sphere’ (Eley 1994). According to Eley, the public sphere is not the neutral context from which the rational political discourse can emerge, as in Habermas’s ideal model. It is, in contrast, ‘... an arena of contested meanings in which different and –opposing- publics maneuvered for space, and from where certain ‘publics’
(women, subordinate nationalities, popular classes like the urban poor, the working class and the peasantry) may have been excluded altogether (Eley 1994:22), as happened during Franco’s dictatorship in Spain. Originally the new hegemonic model acted as a counterweight to the absolutist states in early modern Europe but its development was shaped by local particularities.

The philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1991) claims that this shift also produced a new urban landscape, in which the city space and its production became a commodity and an object of contemplation for the new dominant bourgeois dwellers. For Lefebvre, the hegemony of the bourgeois and their action over space ‘… is exercised over society as a whole, culture and knowledge included, and generally via human mediation: policies, political leaders, parties as also a good many intellectual and experts’ (1991:10). Although Habermas’s approach to the public sphere is highly abstract and ignores the spatial dimension, he analyses in great detail the systemic processes of commodification and bureaucratization in capitalist society and how they are driven through communicative actions. Thus, Habermas’s ‘public sphere’ theoretical framework becomes a useful tool with which to analyse two processes of communication that are connected to the central subject of this research: on the one hand, the process of urban renewals in Barcelona during its recent history of democracy; and on the other, from a marginal and micro level perspective, the development of the graffiti and street art movement in the city. Both are processes of communication and transformation of the urban space but how are they intertwined in the everyday life of Barcelona? To try to answer this question, I am going to work with the idea of public space and its connection with the urban transformations in the city over time. In the following section, I will explain in more detail how different models of urban transformation, such as the ‘Plan Cerdá’ and the ‘Barcelona Model’, affect the everyday life of the city.
1.4. Public Space and Urban transformations in the city

Public space is approached here taking into account two opposite visions that coexist and overlap in everyday life. One vision conceives public space as an unconstrained space within which unauthorized artistic, muralist and graffiti practices can be developed, while the second visualises public space as an entity planned and controlled by local institutions through urban transformations and upon particular models of living. The use of public space and how it is imagined are key factors for the functioning of a democratic system (Fraser 1990, Mitchell 1995). The ideal notion of urban public space, framed by participatory democracy, can be traced back to the Greek agora and imagined as an open space where politics, commerce and spectacle took place. According to Young (1990), in the first public spaces of Greece’s cities, ‘...one should expect to encounter and hear from those who are different, whose social perspectives, experiences and affiliations are different’ (1990: 119). However, this definition of public space does not fit with the ways in which urban public spaces are experienced in existing democracies (Fraser 1990). Instead the rights to public space, as Don Mitchell (2003) states, are embedded in conflicts and struggles between ‘dominant’ and what Nancy Fraser (1990) calls ‘subaltern counter-public’ claims in relation to groups that are not represented and recognized at the dominant ‘public’ level. But is public space an arena for political activities and discussions about public matters and therefore the material location of the ‘public sphere’, as many theorists put it (Fraser 1990;
Hartley 1992; Howell 1993) or are the political actions in democratic societies developed in the aspatial public sphere proposed by Habermas?

Space, and how it is linked to modernity and the ways of making politics in democratic societies through the conception of public space, is central in the above arguments. I argue in this research that since the effects and development of modernity in Barcelona at the end of nineteenth century the making and use of the public space in Barcelona have played, and still play, an important role in the practice of politics in this city. Here I follow Hannah Arendt’s approach to participatory democracy and how she links modernity to space and proposes a normative model of political space, in which:

‘Politics... is a matter of people sharing a common world and a common space of appearance in which public concerns can emerge and be articulated from different perspectives. For politics to occur it is not enough to have a collection of private individuals voting separately and anonymously according to their private opinions. Rather, these individuals must be able to see and talk to one another in public, to meet in a public space so that their differences as well as their communalities can emerge and become the subject of democratic debates’ (Arendt in Entreves 1992:152).

Arendt’s ideal vision of public space fosters criticism of universalist conceptions of space and politics in modernity. Arendt talks about ‘loss of space’ in modernity and how the conquering of spaces by governments and economic powers has reduced citizens’ opportunities to participate in politics (Arendt in Howell 1993: 315). Therefore, for Arendt, public space becomes an arena for political communication, where citizens can be empowered at the local level and participate in politics. This strong version of public political life is not so common in the public spaces of western cities. However, in this research it enables me to explore and question the political role of space in the city of Barcelona over time through its ‘historical geography’ (Howell 1993). Looking at the processes of urban transformation in Barcelona since 1860, we can identify tensions between different interests marked by local and global and social and economic positions and shaped by dominant and subaltern or resistance relationships in the city.

At the end of the 19th century, the military walls that surrounded and limited the expansion of Barcelona were broken and the city began to expand towards its
present-day spatial dimensions. After a long period of discussion between politicians and private investors, the first great urban expansion in the city was approved in 1860. Following rationalist and functionalist principles, the engineer Ildefonso Cerdá (1815-1876) designed the so-called ‘Plan Cerdá’. This urban plan implied a breakdown, not only with regard to the dimensions of the city and its narrow streets but also with regard to the conception of the city and the style of life within it. In Cerdá’s project, almost all of the streets were organized and balanced as part of a regular geometrical grip with perpendicular intersections. In addition, one of the main aims of the new urban plan was to improve the hygiene in the city and facilitate the mobility of goods and the inhabitants in the new city space. The new city would include not only an extension of the old space but also a redefinition of social and economic relations in the city. Thus according to Aibar & Bijker (1997) ‘Interactions between the relevant social groups involved a complex process of alliances, enrolments and negotiations concerning the extension issue. As a result, a significant redefinition of the social map took place’ (1997:12). But the new map of Barcelona, shaped by modernity, was not only made by the emergent bourgeois class in the city, but also built by workers from other parts of Spain.

The waves of immigrants that the city received throughout its modern history shaped its urban transformations. The limited housing that the city could offer to the new inhabitants produced another expansion of the city, but this time it was not so well ordered and planned. According to the anthropologist Manuel Delgado (2007), the waves of immigrants from poorer regions of Spain produced different forms of urban development in the Spanish cities. These new urban extensions contained self-constructed housing in non-urban land and the development of the barraquismo, “slums”, which increased considerably between the 1940s and 1960s. In Barcelona, the disorganized and uncontrolled urban development of the first half of the twentieth century began to be planned and managed by institutions and private construction companies in the sixties. This new period was associated with the Spanish urban desarrollismo, a kind of urbanism characterized by high levels of speculation and corruption and materialized in the construction of high scale

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8 Extensive urban redevelopment that has parallels in cities throughout the rest of Europe as sites of exchange value (McNeill 1999: 136).
housing located on the peripheries of the city with limited infrastructures and minimum council services. Josep Maria De Porcióles was the mayor in office for most of this time (1957 to 1973). In 1973, he was forced to resign due to the protests that arose in these new neighborhoods. The inhabitants protested against the conditions in which they lived and the poor services that the council provided in their neighborhoods (McNeill 1999).

In the collaborative work *La Ciutat de la Gent*, “The city of the people” (1997), the curators Borja-Villel and Chevrier and the photographer Horsfield looked at three of these peripheral new neighbourhoods built in the 1950s and 1960s. In ‘Ciutat Memiridiana’, ‘Vallbona’ and ‘Torre Baró’, they explore the relationships between history and memory, and people and the spaces in Barcelona. The authors refer to Walter Benjamin (2005[1938-1940]) and his critique of positivist history, interest in failure and the ‘history of losers’ to produce a counter-model of the city that allows them to transgress not only the uniform and progressive nature of the official history but also the manufactured and sellable image of the city today. Their counter-model contains traces of collective memory from the inhabitants’ personal stories, as well as black and white photographs of local people, situations and landscapes of the city taken by Horsfield. In addition, the three authors of the project contrast and discuss their counter representation of the city with the official image of the city linked to the great urban renewals during the period of democracy. They argue that in the ‘other’ Barcelona, the one that is not visited by tourists and does not appear in architecture magazines, there is still a great connection between the people and the neighbourhoods in which they live. This connection, they state, is reinforced by the image of the space and the common identities and memories that the people share.

The particular and local features of the above neighbourhoods contrast with the idea of modernity applied in the extension of the city through the ‘Plan Cerdá’, approved in 1860. As I stated above, this urban plan marked the birth of a new geographic and social map in the city, where industries and new neighbourhoods started to flourish and the bourgeoisie and working classes established themselves in different urban areas. But how did the expansion of the city and its social changes, framed by modernity, influence the way of making politics? Did this new
situation create a general 'public sphere' and a more democratic society in the city? According to Habermas (1989), the industrialization and population growth in European and North American cities in the eighteenth century changed the scale and scope of social and political communication ‘... from face to face and small-scale communication to a broad communication system called ‘public sphere’ (1989:181). For Habermas (2004), the bourgeois ‘public sphere’ of a democratic society played a key role in the integration of citizens in modern time. The ‘public sphere’, he argues, encloses the process of public opinion and will formation, which reproduces ‘a brittle form of collective identity’ (2004:10).

Theoretically speaking, Habermas (1989) conceives of the ‘public sphere’ as a non-spatial arena of discussion and mediation linked to the inhabitants’ participation. Here the ‘steering media’, comprising by the mass media and other public sphere organizations, act as independent channels of communication that mediate between the civil society and the state, and nourish public discourses from private will (Habermas in Benson 2009: 182). Habermas’s normative conception of the ‘bourgeoisie public sphere’ implies a total separation between civil society and the state. Thereby the communicative actions in the ‘public sphere’ are developed in two basic and separated social spheres: the ‘lifeworld’ based on interpersonal relations at the domestic level, and ‘the system’ based on the opaque structures of the market economy and the state. Habermas’s model of a universal ‘public sphere’ is useful, not only to evaluate the levels of citizens’ participation in politics, but also to critique how the public sphere is controlled or ‘colonized’, as Habermas puts it, by the state and the economic powers. Are these relationships expressed in public space too? And do we need to preserve public space as the arena of plural public spaces, as Arendt puts it?

Nancy Fraser's (1990) critical approach to the ‘public sphere’ states that the public sphere encloses a double function: as a discursive arena and as a means to form and perform social identities (1990:69). Thus, under real world conditions of inequality, Fraser continues, it is more adequate to talk about multiple public spheres. Here, the non-governmental social contestations are the only way to reduce political voice inequality, give a political voice and challenge the basic features of the legitimacy and efficacy of the ‘bourgeoisie public sphere’ (Fraser
Looking at the public space in western cities today, it cannot be said to represent the ancient and permanent political space of the Greek polis, in which citizens could engage in politics. In contrast, as Hannah Arendt (1973) claims, the individuals in late capitalist societies no longer ‘act’ but ‘merely behave’ as economic producers, consumers and urban city dwellers (1973:39). In these contexts of tensions between legitimacy and contestation, public and private spheres and different political and economic goals: what does it mean to make graffiti or ban its practice in public space?

Public space can be seen as the expression of the public sphere and therefore as an exercise of ideological construction linked to particular social groups (Marston 1990:450) but it is also the material ground where non-governmental collectives can ‘...contest issues of democracy and citizenship’ (Howell 1993:318) and claim the space for political representation (Mitchell 1995:115). Thus community gardens in New York (Staeheli, Mitchell & Gibson 2002), ‘People’s Park’ in Berkeley California (Mitchell 1995) and squatted factories in ‘Poble Nou’ Barcelona (Marrero 2008), became sites in which ‘a public’ linked to different communities was formed to claim rights to the city. In those cases, the conceptualization of ‘the public’ focused on a different set of rights and the rights holders were the basis of the conflicts between the cities’ councils and the local communities. For instance, in the mid 1990s in New York, the conflict over community gardens showed how the community of gardeners proposed a conceptualization of rights that incorporated the right to public space to defend the existence of community gardens while opposing the city council’s proposal to build individual housings units in the same spaces (Staeheli, Mitchell & Gibson 2002: 200).

In the same vein, the space known as the ‘People’s park’ in Berkeley and the factories squatted by cultural collectives such as ‘La Makabra’ in Barcelona represented strongholds for the practice of a different conception of the ‘public’. In this sense, Don Mitchell (1995) argues that ‘...spaces like ‘People's park’ are also political spaces’ (1995:125). Thus public space is both the object of the conflicts and the stage where the social movements perform and claim their right over it in public. In his work, which focuses on the urban conflict of ‘Poble Nou’ in Barcelona, Marrero (2008) highlights how the proactive and resistance capacity of a social
movement can question and condition the public sphere of the city. It could be said that these ways of acting in public space are attempts to create laws within it, in opposition to those implemented by the state and the economic powers. The public sphere, in these contexts, can be seen as something experimental and experiential and closer to what Holmes (2006) defines, making reference to the artistic autonomy, as an ‘experimental public sphere’ that brings different ‘…sensible worlds into collective questioning’ (2006: 549).

As such the material public space is actively reconfigured and embodied by participants through public actions. At those precise moments, as Butler (2012) says, politics does not take place exclusively in the ‘…public sphere distinct from a private one…’ (2012:117). In contrast, politics happens in multiple material and virtual spaces and circulates through different platforms of communication such as the celebration of the national day of Catalonia called ‘La Diada’⁹. Here the material space also has a dual function: as a supporter of the actions, and as part of the image of the bodily action. It is not only the space for democratic and egalitarian aims but also for contradictory and conflictive situations. During the last years of Franco’s dictatorship, the walls of the cities and towns were transformed into a battlefield. Here graffiti was used not only as a contested weapon against the fascist regime but also as a repressed one crossing the existing graffiti on the walls and later creating graffiti that legitimated the regime (Sempere 1977: 52). So can public space and its different uses end up being overlapped by a hegemonic or totalitarian public sphere and appropriated or manipulated by it?

Making reference to the relationship between urban transformations and the different ways of understanding and making the public space in the city, Delgado (2006) states that the public space of the city is a space built on conflicts, and differentiates between two different forms of ‘urbanism’: the urbanismo de la política, “urbanism of politics”, in the hands of political and economic powers, and the urbanismo de lo político, “urbanism of the political”, connected to the inhabitants who feel excluded from the urban space (2006:2). Material examples of

⁹ ‘La Diada’ celebrated on every 11th of September, has over the last three years become the day to take over the streets, squares and even roads and countryside areas of Catalonia, not only to celebrate and create awareness of the nationalist Catalan identity but also to perform and communicate political goals linked to a future new identity, and independent national state.
this alternative form of urbanism are the construction of barricades in the streets, the self-constructed housing in non-urban areas and the creation of graffiti on public walls. Within this second way of making urbanism, the graffiti artists are able to participate as urban ‘curators’ (Schalk 2007) in the city’s public space. The ‘urban curator’ is seen as an ‘independent cultural worker’, who is able to sidestep the constraints imposed by the mythical and symbolic dimension imposed over the city space by architects, the state bureaucracy and the market economy, to propose alternative relationships between people and their urban environments (Schalk 2007: 165, 157). Today the new mythical and symbolic image of Barcelona is connected with its more recent urban transformations during the time of democracy. The new city space is drawn under the so-called ‘Barcelona Model’. This model promises to be made for, and by, the people of the city.

The architect and city planner Oriol Bohigas wrote the manifesto, Reconstructión de Barcelona, “The reconstruction of Barcelona”, in 1985, laying the ground for the ‘Barcelona Model’. The manifesto proposed a city shaped by democratic principles and open to the sea, which had been, until then, taken over by the industries of the city. According to Bohigas (1985), this new way of making urbanism in Barcelona should pay attention to ‘the colors, the smells, the touch, the taste and the noise of the world around us’ in order to prioritize the locals’ necessities (1985:16).

In 1986 Barcelona was chosen to host the 1992 Olympic games. The organization of the event was the catalyst to drive urban transformations in the city under the new principles drawn up by Bohigas (1985) in his manifesto. This urban renewal of the city contributed to the success of the Olympic games, and created an image of a modern, cosmopolitan and cultural city exportable to the whole world. The ‘Barcelona model’ was born and it began to be known as a reference example for the urban transformation of other postindustrial capitalist cities. In 1999, the Royal Institute of British Architects recognized Barcelona’s urban and architectural accomplishment through its Royal Gold Medal, which was awarded to the city and its citizens. And years later, Ken Livingstone10, Mayor of London during the London 2012 bid for the Olympics, said that Barcelona’s achievement in transforming its

urban areas for the 1992 Olympics had shaped London’s plan to regenerate the East End.

The sociologist Jordi Borja (2009) states that the initial stage of the ‘Barcelona model’ was framed within the first twenty years of democracy after Franco’s dictatorship, and founded on what he calls ‘participatory urbanism’. According to him, the development of urban projects during this time was shaped by the needs of the inhabitants of the city and their participation in the projects. Thus, Barcelona’s council designed the urban projects with the participation and input of grass root organizations such as neighborhood and professional associations. This new way of doing and participating in the urbanism of the city marked the transition from a totalitarian regime to a democratic one.

‘Culture’\(^\text{11}\), as the aim of the urban renewals, was another key element in many of the urban strategies developed in Barcelona. This element has been widely studied in relation to the ‘Barcelona Model’ (García 2004; Dodd 2003; Harvey 2006, Marrero 2008). Making reference to the relationship between culture, art and urban renewals in Barcelona, Manuel Borja-Villel (1997), the former director of the MACBA and current director of the ‘Reina Sofia’ museum in Madrid, states that ‘… culture has not been thought as a means to enrich the life of the people, but as a way to create a brand name, an image of the city as a tourist resort’ (1997:169).

Borja-Villel’s statement posits a city where culture itself becomes an urban tool to create a sellable image of the city. This fits with Benjamin’s idea of ‘phantasmagoria’,\(^\text{12}\) that is as the creation of a fiction that tricks and manipulates the sensory experiences of the people. Hence the city space is transformed into a general urban environment that tries to control the experience of the ‘reality’.

Following Benjamin’s critical approach to modernity, the role of ‘art’ is no longer linked to extraordinary sensual experiences of reality but is used to fuel the urban transformation of the city and attract visitors. As Buck-Morss (1992) stated when

\(^{11}\) By ‘Culture’ I refer to Julier’s conception of urban ‘designscapes’ in which: ‘Culture is no longer one of pure representation or narrative where visual culture conveys messages’. Instead, it is around us, lived in rather than encountered (Lash 2002) and Julier continues: ‘… design culture formulates, formats, channels, circulates, contains and retrieves information through a number of channels’ (2005:875).

\(^{12}\) For Benjamin the idea of phantasmagoria was linked to the experience of intoxication of the reality in the city. In Passagen-Werk, Benjamin describes this idea of phantasmagoria in public space in connection with the Paris shopping arcades and the World Fairs and how both created fictional experiences of the reality.
writing about Walter Benjamin’s vision of Paris, ‘... art enters into the
‘phantasmagoric’ field as entertainment, as part of the commodity world’
(1992:23). The use of architecture, culture and art to produce a recognized image
of the city has been used in many other cities to attract private investments and
increase the cities’ ‘symbolic capital’ (Harvey 2006). Thus museums, cultural
centres and iconic buildings, designed by internationally recognized architects,
have become symbols of identity and tourist attractions for the western cities
during the last twenty years. The Guggenheim museum in Bilbao designed by Frank
Ghery (1997), and the Museum of Modern Art in Barcelona (MACBA) by Richard
Meier (1995), are only two examples of many similar projects developed in the
post-industrial cities.

In the case of Barcelona, these urban and architectural projects have been
complemented by the organization of great events, such as the 1992 Olympic
games and the ‘Universal Forum of Cultures’ in 2004, which was backed by
‘UNESCO’. Looking in a comparative way at cultural events such as ‘the European
capital of Culture’ in Glasgow in 1990, the ‘Olympic Games’ in Sydney in 2000 and
analyses the relationship between urban renewals and cultural sustainable
programmes in the cities. In this context, she claims that art and culture are
generally used in ‘a tokenistic manner’ to facilitate real estate business more than
to address local economic and social issues (2004:101). In contrast, Diane Dodd
(2003) highlights how the organization of the ‘Olympic Games’ in Barcelona
enhanced the role of culture in the everyday life of the city. She describes how the
Games were inspired by the Hellenic tradition of ‘Cultural Olympiad’. This implied
the organization of multiple and diverse cultural events throughout the four years
prior to the games and motivated, according to Dodd, ‘... a rebirth of Catalan
cultural life...’ (2003:55). The urban renewals and the new cultural facilities built in
the city at that time, as Dodd says, were not made or marketed exclusively for
tourists, but were principally thought of and offered for the local citizens. Here the
idea of culture works at different levels: to construct a common cultural identity, to
build cultural facilities, and finally to create a modern and distinct image of
Barcelona that tourists understand and enjoy as part of the ‘authentic’ Catalan
culture.

The above examples show how the use of culture as a means to promote urban transformations and construct local identities can be embedded in contradictory discourses. In his PhD thesis, which focuses on the ‘Can Ricart’ conflict in Barcelona, Isaac Marrero (2008) describes how the 22@ urban plan, one of the latest and most controversial processes of urban transformation in Barcelona, was driven by the implementation of knowledge, development and technology in the city. The aim of the plan was to convert the former industrial neighbourhood of ‘Poble Nou’ into the city’s technological and innovation district. In opposition to the official urban plan, the heterogeneous local collective that formed the platform ‘Salvem Can Ricart’, was very committed to the role of culture in this area of the city. As an alternative to the official urban plan, they proposed a plan in which culture might be used as an economic driver in the protection of industrial patrimony and to promote creativity and the cultural industries that existed in the area (2008:15). Finally the promotion of culture at the local level and as alternative pillars for the 22@ urban regeneration of area was eventually dismissed in favour of the official plan. Here the role of culture was not just part of an urban conflict in the city. In contrast, it must be understood within a complex and multi-layered reality formed by different political and economic perspectives.

The success and international recognition of the ‘Barcelona Model’, in which the 22@ urban plan is framed, encloses a less visible and even dark side to the city. In this sense, the anthropologist Manuel Delgado (2007) argues that the ‘Barcelona Model’ also meant a massive number of evictions, speculation, corruption and repression against of the ungovernable (2007:14). The urban renewals in the city have nurtured the creation of social movements too. These movements were founded from heterogeneous groups in which graffiti and street artists were actively involved. During the last decade, movements such as ‘El Forat de la Vergonya’ in the district of ‘Ciutat Vella’ and the previously mentioned ‘Salvem Can Ricart’ in ‘Poble Nou’ have resisted and fought back against the principles and desires of the powerful ‘Barcelona Model’.
One of the greatest and most violent protests associated with urban matters during the democratic period in the city came in the form of the squatters’ movement. This movement is addressed in more detail in chapter 3, where I describe my involvement in the painting of a graffiti mural in the squatted building of ‘La Carboneria’.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the youths of the city began to occupy abandoned buildings. Here they could live independently from their parents and at the same time create alternative political spaces managed by autonomous collectives. In 1996, they established themselves in a long-abandoned cinema called ‘Cine Princesa’ at the foot of Via Laietana Street. The cinema became identifiable by the graffiti messages written on its facades, and turned into an alternative social centre for meetings, social dinners and film shows on Chiapas and animal rights (McNeill 1999:132). After seven months of occupation, the eviction of the squatters from the building resulted in a battle between the security forces and the okupas, “squatters”, firstly in the building and later in the streets. The days following the eviction saw a debate in the media channels and protests in the streets over the lack of political will in addressing the shortages of affordable housing for young people. In addition, the support that the squatters received from a wide range of people allowed the squatter movements to participate and be considered at the public level. Overall, the ‘Barcelona Model’ can be seen as a fantasy of the ‘public sphere’ in the city, managed by the local council and the economic powers, but where non-governmental collectives find gaps to shake it up and claim different rights to those fostered by the model.

14 https://youtu.be/llUc5k2NVrk
15 https://youtu.be/gVnSBJY2SBQ
One of the current circumstances that illustrates the tension between the aims of the ‘Barcelona Model’ and the everyday life of the local inhabitants, is represented by the influence of mass tourism in the city.

The 1.6 million residents of Barcelona have seen the number of tourists visiting the city rise from 1.7 million in 1990 to more than 7.44 million in 2012. In the documentary ‘Bye Bye Barcelona’ (2014), the author Eduardo Chibás (2014) states: ‘I don’t know any resident in Barcelona that in someway doesn’t feel that there is something wrong with the amount of people who come here every year’ (Chibás in Bye Bye Barcelona 2014). The mass tourism has created a conflict between the city imagined and promoted by urban planners, architects and politicians and that experienced by the inhabitants.

Graffiti and street artists have expressed this tension between tourists and local inhabitants on the walls of the city’s public space. For instance, the graffiti ‘Tourist go Home’ keeps appearing periodically on the walls of streets transited by tourists. I have seen this graffiti next to the moving stairways that link the ‘Vallcarca’ neighbourhood to Gaudi’s ‘Park Guell’. This place is an example of the local ‘modernisme’ architecture and art in the city and is one of the signs that form part of the ‘tourist gaze’ of the city. The sociologist John Urry (1990) states in his landmark work about mass tourism ‘The Tourist gaze’ that: ‘The gaze is constructed through signs, and tourism involves the collection of signs’ (1990:3).

Inspired by the same issue, there are other examples of more elaborate and permanent graffiti murals. In the same area and next to the squatted building and social centre of ‘La Montaña’, graffiti murals represent the relationship between tourist and residents claiming: ‘Good for the tourists, Bad for the Neighbours’ and ‘Tourist you are the terrorists’. The wall on which this graffiti was written does not exist today but the text ‘Tourist you are the terrorists’ keeps appearing throughout the city.

The overcrowded streets in the city centre have been targeted by some of the local graffiti artists to protest against mass tourism. Graffiti artists used stencils to paint the street floor and divide it into two separate lanes: one for the ‘tourists’ and the other for the locals ‘Barcelonans’. Using the same stencil technique and trying to
engage the pedestrian directly in their artworks, another example of this kind of graffiti was painted during the local festivities in the neighbourhood of ‘Gracia’. Here it was possible to read on the floor in different streets of the neighbourhood, ‘No Tourist Allowed. Thanks for your Collaboration’.

Throughout the last two decades, the tourist industry sector and the local government have collaborated in building a very specific urban environment. The result is a city in which the commodification of public space for mass tourism has transformed everyday life in the city. This prompts the questions: is today’s graffiti linked directly to art activism and the history of political protests in public space and how can I approach these different expressions of the everyday life in the city? To begin to answer these questions, in the following section I will explain how my model of the city is focused on ‘textures’ and ‘surfaces’ and framed within the following theoretical approaches to the city.

1.5 Surfaces and Textures of the city
The city is a major investigative subject of the social sciences. Sociologists of the Chicago School, such as Robert Park and Ernest Burges, began and established the foundation in the 1920s, to conceive of the city not only as a simple centre of coexistence among humanity but as a super-organism that encloses numerous processes of adaptation and accommodation to diverse microenvironments; from African-American ghettos (Anderson 1990, Wacquant 1994) to neighbourhoods’ sidewalk life in American cities (Duneier 1999, Jacobs 1961, Zukin 2009). In some of these studies, processes such as urban renewals and gentrification are taken as key points to explore everyday life in the communities of the city. The neighbourhoods are approached as organized entities through which to observe how the cities function or malfunction. In this sense, Jane Jacobs (1961) states: ‘A
sidewalk life... arises only when the concrete tangible facilities it requires are present’ (1961:70). This organic functioning of the city can be identified in connection with informal social structures such as the one around street vendors in the neighbourhoods of New York (Duneier 1999) and those described by Zukin (2009) as signs of the ‘authenticity’ in Harlem and Brooklyn: ‘it is the social diversity, and not just the diversity of building and uses, that gives the city its soul’ (2009:31). But is the everyday life in the city based on an organic entity?

In the mid 20th century, anthropologists and other social scientists at the University of Manchester started to discuss and formulate another significant approach to studying the city. For them, the city space was not merely a geographical area, built according to the inscriptions of a historical time, it was also seen as a space covered by social networks: from household relationships among the urban poor (Stack 1974, 1996) to power and knowledge relationships based on processes of urban renewal and architecture (Rabinow 1989, Greenbaum 1993). These social networks transgress the ecological microenvironments in the city and can cross geographical and cultural boundaries, transport knowledge and create new identities. The ‘social network’ paradigm is applicable to this research with regard to the relationships between graffiti artists. They are seen as part of collectives, gangs and crews not only in the neighborhoods but also across the cities, countries and virtual networks. This also allows us to approach the question of how street artists engage in relationships with institutions such as museums, art galleries and council departments (Suarez 2011, JR 2009, Macdonald 2001).

The ‘ecological’ and ‘social network’ approaches to the city must be taken into account in this research on the community of graffiti and street artists in Barcelona and the question that I am posing about how the practice of graffiti re-conceives and changes the experience of public space in the city. I am going to focus in on how the city is lived and embodied by its inhabitants, particularly graffiti and street artists but also myself. I propose in this research to engage in anthropology ‘in’ the city rather than anthropology ‘of’ the city (Low 1996: 384). Cities have been metaphorically conceived of as bodies and described with adjectives related to characteristics of human beings. The ‘situationist’ architect Constant Nieuwenhuys (1953) claimed that cities were an extension of ‘...bodily organs to accommodate
the needs of large groups’ (Constant in Sadler 1998:148). Other examples of cities being seen as human beings are Walter Benjamin’s (1969) description of the city as a ‘dream-world’ ready to ‘anaesthetise’ its inhabitants and make them forget and consume (Benjamin in Buck Morss 1995), Sharon Zukin’s (2009) image of New York as the ‘Naked city’ that has lost its soul due to the mass construction and gentrification processes and Manuel Delgado’s (2007) critique of Barcelona as ‘The lying city’ that hides its social reality under an ideal ‘model’. The fact that graffiti and street artists transform the sensory order of public space raises questions about the connection between the material realm of the city and the human bodies within it. Therefore, it is possible to identify the sensory order of public space through the human actions and experiences in it and to ask how the interactions between cities, and human bodies enclose political actions and meanings? Do the cities as Sharon Zukin (2009) puts it, have a ‘soul’? And if they do, how can we identify and represent it?

In trying to answer similar questions, researchers from different social science disciplines have used Marxist theories to research the city. These approaches to the city (Harvey 1989, Castells 1977, Delgado 2007) address matters such as the commodification of public space, the value of land and labour-power. Drawing on political economy approaches, they describe ‘...a city that works in the interest of capital accumulation and exploitation’ (Bridge & Watson 2002: 15). This exploitation, as Walter Benjamin (1969 in Buck-Morss 1995) claims, is not only economic but also cognitive. In this context, it can be said that Barcelona is recognized at the local and international levels by its specific image, which is built on ‘...its steady amassing of symbolic capital and its accumulating marks of distinction’ (Harvey 2006: 104). This image, therefore, can be seen and experienced from multiple perspectives. To get an insight into how this image of the city affects everyday life in the city, I approach it in sensory terms looking at the surfaces and the ‘aesthetic’ of public space.

I follow and apply Rancièr’s (2009b) broad notion of aesthetics in my research using his study of critical art. Thus I argue that the public space functions as a camouflage ‘aesthetic’ that covers and homogenizes the diversity of the population. The image of the city is framed by politics and aesthetics and represents particular
ways of doing and being. Today, the ‘Barcelona model’ and the tourist images of Barcelona drive many of the aspects of everyday life in the city. The institutions and many of the businesses of the city sell this image and promote urban renewals to drive the imagination and desire of tourists who visit the city. It is an image disliked by many of the inhabitants who feel trapped and conditioned under its spell. The ‘breakdown’ of this trap and its ‘aesthetics’ by graffiti and street artists and how this implies an alternative ‘distribution of the sensible’ of the city’s public space set my scope for the study of graffiti in the city. Thus I argue in this thesis that the city cannot be approached as an object or an idea, but as a lived experience based on actions and imagination (Borden 2001:9). It can be felt and stimulated by textural properties of neighbourhoods, different kinds of architecture and properties of objects such as fences, walls or whole buildings that we can find in the city.

Anthropologists have focused on the properties of texture to explore how surface plays an important role in the construction of knowledge and performances. Jurg Wassmann’s analysis (1991) shows how for the Yupno people in Papua New Guinea, the different textures of the ‘kirugu’ – a type of knotted cord used in their rituals- create a relation between material object and mental process that organizes the ritual performance according to clan stories, migratory movements and songs. The texture of the ‘kirugu’ therefore stimulates the mind, body and senses, triggering ritual performances, singing or story telling. From the graffiti artists’ perspective, there is also a relationship between surfaces in the city, thoughts and actions in connection with their work. Particular properties of walls, the feeling of previous experiences and qualities that may relate to individual and intimate experience can elicit certain memories or emotions that shape the action and practice of the graffiti artists. The city, as Marilyn Strathern (1979) states about objects, is constitutive of persons and therefore shapes the formation of lived worlds. Also on this point Howard Morphy (1989) states about Yolngu artists of Australia, that they deliberately create ‘shimmering’ visual effects in their paintings that draw the attention and response of Yolngu people because they have learnt how to see them. Texture has the capacity to index what to outsiders and uninitiated may be invisible and in this way graffiti artists transform the surfaces of
abandoned and squatted buildings, creating awareness in the citizens about social centres, collective actions and urban speculation in the city.

The starting point for defining my textural approach to the city is the idea that public space acts as an interface of political meanings between the city's inhabitants. It allows us to see graffiti as a movement beyond the tensions between urban authorities and graffiti writers over the presence/absence of graffiti in public space. This movement is fueled by creativity, forms of making graffiti, artworks and people, and produces the graffiti texture of Barcelona. I use the term 'texture', a concept that I have taken from the philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1991), so as to explore the public space of the city and how it is produced. In this sense, the texture of the city space is based on a material surface covered by a plurality of networks in constant movement ‘… as part of a particular production of space' (Lefebvre 1991: 18).

Maybe it could be said that the "lying city", as Manuel Delgado describes it, does exist, appearing to us in different forms and faces, according to each individual and their interaction and conception of the space in which they live. Throughout my fieldwork in Barcelona, I produced my own ‘texture’ of the city formed by experiences, material objects and social relations (Lefebvre 1991, Irving 2011, Borden 2001). This is a city marked by the houses where I lived, the neighborhoods that I explored and the routes that I created and followed. As time went by, this ‘texture’ began to expand through my engagement in social relations with members of the different groups of the graffiti and street art community. Simultaneously, it fostered social networks, which became loaded with meanings and memories. This texture that I am proposing imbricates the public space of the city with the production of graffiti and how it is experienced at different times and in different spaces in Barcelona. My interactions in the city go beyond the material surfaces of the city and end up permeated with them. Here I follow Tim Ingold's (2007) argument in his critique of Christopher Tilley's materiality approach to the artistic value in the placed stones found in landscapes like that of Stonehenge as an interface between nature and culture. Ingold argues that we have to take ‘… materials seriously, since it is from them that everything is made’ (2007: 14).
In this sense, the graffiti ‘texture’ can be understood as a communicative fabric that mediates between the material properties of graffiti works and the practices within the public space. It allows us to look at graffiti not only as images but also as acts embedded in surfaces, sensory orders and social relations. Thus graffiti in public space and how it is seen and made interacts with the official way of making and seeing the city’s public space. The graffiti artists have found in the surfaces of the public space alternative ways of interacting and communicating in the city. The trains are the perfect surfaces for the circulation of their images across the city spaces. Business shutters offer frames on which to inscribe their names or develop artworks and the walls of abandoned buildings can become multidimensional spaces for experimentation. The graffiti ‘texture’ implies, therefore, a sense of ‘embodied multiplicity’ shaped by collective and individual interactions. This ‘embodied multiplicity’ undermines the dominant discourse of a fixed space and proposes a city space that is unfixed and indeterminate (Chang 2013: 219).

It is in the public space interactions between the dominant and conventionalized ‘aesthetics’ and the graffiti ‘aesthetics’ that the graffiti ‘texture’ is materialized. This ‘texture’, therefore, contains different relationships driven by bodies, material elements and spaces, memories and history. Hence, what Ranciére (2009b) describes as the ‘distribution of the sensible’ is challenged or confirmed through the production of alternative sensible orders or the repetition of the established ones. This means that the graffiti ‘texture’ in Barcelona needs to be embodied through face-to-face relationships and street artwork experiences to access its processes of transformation and communication in public space.
Chapter 2. Visual Cultures

2.1 Introduction

In chapter one, I proposed looking at graffiti and street art in Barcelona as ‘textures’ (Lefebvre 1991). This concept allows me to map the city space as a constellation of networks, which are linked by graffiti interventions, art collectives and graffiti artworks. It also helps me to think about the image of the city as mutually constituted by ways of seeing and ways of living. Here, in chapter two the visual culture of graffiti images is approached as part of social transactions, and of what W.J.T Mitchell (2002) defines ‘... as a repertory of screen images or templates that structure our encounters with other humans beings’ (2002: 175).

The discipline known as visual culture is integrated into this research as a broad field of critical practice, shaped not only by materials linked to art history, aesthetics and media studies but also to everyday ways of seeing in the city. This everyday seeing is defined by Mitchell (2002) as ‘vernacular visuality’ and implies the study of both the social construction of vision and the visual construction of the social (2002:170). Visuality is, therefore, a keyword for the field of visual culture but it is not limited to the sense of sight and linked only to a particular spatiotemporal way of seeing. The study of the visuality of graffiti in Barcelona raises questions about the specific relations of vision to other senses and about the practice of graffiti as part of other communal practices in the city. In short, visuality, as Hal Foster (1988) argues, involves at the same time sight as social fact and as a physical operation (body and psyche) and it is entangled in a contradictory realm, which is understood as both a way of representing dominant culture and ‘... a means of resisting it by means of reverse appropriation’ (Mirzoeff 2006:53).

I see the city as a visual subject that is both the object of discussions and debates and the contested arena of individual and collective actions. In terms of its visualities, I understand the city space, according to Martin Jay’s (1988) statement about Western modernity, ‘... as a contested terrain, rather than as a harmoniously integrated complex of visual theories and practices’ (1988:4). This accommodates a diversity of urban environments and the struggle over representation within it is marked by a conjunction of politics and aesthetics.
Alongside the concern for the senses and the phenomenological approach in the graffiti ‘texture’ that I am proposing, graffiti also operates in a symbolic domain. Here I follow Neil Jarman (1998), who claims that the mural paintings in Northern Ireland are used as ‘...symbolic objects in themselves’ (1998: 2). Jarman (1998) argues that murals are not static images but exist transcending their material limits to become part of the mutable and complex processes of a globalized society. Many of the graffiti and street artworks in Barcelona become symbols of social and political movements. This is what I will explore further in the following chapters of this thesis. I claim that street artworks in Barcelona foster the creation of a symbolic landscape with political signifiers. An example of such a symbolic landscape can be found in Sao Paulo (Brazil), where themes linked to African and indigenous South American imageries and folk art have been fused with western modernist movements such as surrealism and abstract art forms, making a distinctive style of graffiti and street art. Applying a ‘ecosocial-semiotics’ approach, Da Silva, McCafferty and Teixeira (2011) propose to study such graffiti as signs that are used by people to shape the environment and, in turn, these same signs can shape them as part of a complex, mutable and non-linear process where the meanings of the environment are actively coproduced by the people who create and experience it (2011: 5). They describe the political role of graffiti art as a form of demonstration, creating social and critical awareness or conscientização in the community. In sum, they conclude that the graffiti interventions in Sao Paulo try to influence and condition the social and political consciousness of community members. As Jarman (1998) states, murals are not static images contained within fixed ideological frameworks but can be reproduced, transformed and even manipulated.

I want to combine the above approaches (phenomenological and semiotic) so as to look at graffiti in the context of the visuality of the city, as part of its architecture, when architecture is appreciated and embodied in terms of surfaces and textures, but also symbolically as signs of the city. The visual history of architecture in Barcelona and how it is understood and conserved today is a good place to start illustrating this struggle over representation in the city that I am investigating.
2.2 Visualising Barcelona

The material traces of the project of modernity that began in Barcelona at the end of the nineteenth century are today part of the symbolic and sellable image of the city. Many of them are architectural constructions linked to the ‘Modernisme’ movement, which had a great architectural impact in the city through the works of architects such as Gaudí, Rubio, Puig i Cadafalch, and Lluis Domenech i Montaner. The exploration of new shapes and surfaces worked alongside an ideological framework in which the Catalan national identity was intertwined with a new bourgeoisie class identity, the possibility of which was offered by different materials and the idea of cosmopolitanism in the city (Bozal 1973: 74). At the beginning of the XX century, another cultural movement known as ‘Noucentisme’ represented by architects such as Puig Gairalt and Josep Goday Casals, proposed a more classical and conservative idea of architecture. This political and intellectual approach placed a special emphasis on reviving the classicism of the Mediterranean aesthetics linked to the Catalan national identity (Miralles 2008:2). This contrast can be seen in buildings, which were created according to these different conceptions of seeing by architects and those who appreciated the buildings. The Catalan Museum of Art designed by Carles Buigas at the International Art Fair of 1929 was promoted by people linked to the ‘Neuentismo’ movement in contrast to the ‘Casa Milá’ (La Pedrera), which was designed by Gaudi in 1905 and funded by a local industrialist and it is one of the examples of the ‘Modernisme’ architecture in the city (Sola-Morales 1992: 38). Today both buildings survive as local and touristic symbols and as part of the same architectural ‘texture’ of the city.

The struggle over representation and its connection with politics and aesthetics is part of the art-history of the city. An iconic expression of what is at stake in the
affinity of visual creations with the sense of identity and belonging to Barcelona is *Els Segadors*, “The Reapers”. The artist Joan Miró, in his mural ’Els Segadors’, made for the International Art Fair in Paris in 1937, tried to represent this sense of belonging to Catalonia. This painting was inspired by a peasants’ uprising, which ended in a war with the Castile kingdom (1640-1652), and the 14 months siege of Barcelona in 1714. It is also the name of the official anthem of Catalonia.

In cases like these referential works it is possible to appreciate the connection between politics, art and Catalan cultural identity. Miró was one of the leading figures of the avant-garde art movement in Barcelona, embraced by the city at the end of the 19th century, criticized by many at that time and recognized today as a sign of local identity and an important tourist attraction.

All of these re-iterative interpretations can be considered part of Catalan visual culture but they also represent different visualities within Catalan culture. These visualities exist not only in terms of the material features of the different artworks but also in the ways in which they are manifested by artists, galleries owners, curators, institutions and the public within different contexts.

The graffiti and street art is transformed in this research into different ‘stories’ that contain visual discourses and allow us to explore different surfaces of the city as part of its graffiti ‘texture’. Therefore the graffiti texture, as we will appreciate in the following story16, is intertwined between art and politics, between the material and the immaterial dimensions of the city and finally between its public and private spheres. As Tilley (2004) argues about prehistoric art stones, texture and surface

16 I wrote this story for my research using information that I collected from representatives of the Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona (MACBA), graffiti artists and people in the city who knew about the existence of this mural.
are intrinsic to the agency of stones. Like prehistoric art stones, graffiti walls activate the landscape and reveal relations within it.

In 1989, the recognized graffiti artist and social activist Keith Haring visited Barcelona to paint a big mural on one of the walls of the ‘Salvador Segui’ square in the neighbourhood of ‘El Raval’. The graffiti mural, which was not commissioned but was authorized by the local council, had, according to the artists, a very explicit and descriptive message. Its aim was to create awareness about the transmission and risks of the aids virus. At the time aids was a sickness almost unknown to the majority of the population and an important cause of distress. Not all of the inhabitants of the area accepted Haring’s mural. Some of them felt that they were being stigmatized through the mural message and what it symbolized. The neighbourhood of ‘El Raval’, known as ‘El Barrio Chino’ in Barcelona, was historically linked to the practices of prostitution and in the 1980s was also known as an area notorious for drug abuse and as a selling spot of heroin. That same year, the journalist Manuel Diaz (1989) described this neighbourhood in the Catalan newspaper ‘La Vanguardia’ as follows: ‘Moracos y morenos, putas viejas, yonquis sin edad, chulos, quinquis, desglutidores de sexo, de alcohol, de heroina y de hachis, escriben cada dia la ley en estas calles’, which roughly translates to “Moors and blacks, old whores, junkies without age, pimps, louts, swallowers of sex, alcohol, heroin and hashish, write everyday the law in these streets” (Diaz:1989).

The mural was not created to last as a permanent addition to the street. The idea for its creation arose by chance when Haring met his friend Montse Guillen, an artist-gastronome who owned a restaurant in New York and had lived in Barcelona. She knew people in the ‘Barcelona’s council’, and suggested to Haring the creation
of a mural in the city. These connections meant that Haring obtained permission from the council in one day. Haring accepted only on the condition that he would be able to choose the surface himself. From that moment, the story of this mural and its connection with the space began to be narrated from different perspectives based on personal experiences, memories and institutional statements.

Haring himself died of aids in 1990 and his mural in Barcelona, which was sizeable, being 2.5 metres wide and 33 metres in length, began to fade out and be covered by other graffiti; it finally disappeared when the building was demolished in 1992. In its place La FilmoTeca de Catalunya, “Catalan Film Archive”, was built and publicly inaugurated in 2012. Before the mural’s disappearance, the Museum of Contemporary Art of the city (MACBA) made a tracing of it with the permission of the Keith Haring Foundation. This museum opened its doors in 1995 and was envisaged as a central element in the urban renewal process in ‘El Raval’. Richard Meier, the architect who designed the museum building, stated that it represented all the needs that the neighbourhood had at that time such as light, air, public and open space and even in a metaphoric way a ‘heart’.

‘I began the design of the museum by looking closely at the possibilities offered by the site within this fabric of dense streets characterized by skewed intersections and ancient church domes. The compressed, low-scale mixture of commercial, institutional, and residential buildings offered few open spaces for pedestrian activity. There was no place where people could meet, talk, sit, read, watch children play, or walk their dogs. I felt that it was necessary to create an open pedestrian plaza in front of the museum that would foster this type of activity, and so I was doubly pleased that the city was planning to tear down a few abandoned buildings in order to make that possible’ (Meier 1997: 16).
Today the museum’s copy of Haring’s mural is conserved as part of the MACBA’s collection and has been reproduced17 a couple of times on a wall of the open pedestrian place in front of the museum, next to the mosaic by Spanish-Basque sculptor Chillida. In February 2014, the museum decided to reproduce the mural again and today it is part of ’Plac Del Angel’ the public square outside the museum. But is this Haring’s mural or is it just a manipulation and a reproduction of the original one? I wonder how Haring’s mural and other graffiti and street artworks are intertwined with the textural transformation of the city. In this chapter, I look at how graffiti and street artworks can be transformed alongside the urban transformations, from street art in the streets to artwork in the museum, from ephemeral to permanent objects and from being anti-commercial objects to being commodities.

### 2.3 Visualising graffiti

One of the issues at stake in these processes of transformation is the status of graffiti as a bearer of meaning, that is, as a visual device for communication. The philosopher and linguistic Armando Silva (1987) highlights the potential of graffiti as a means of communication analysing the possible connotations that graffiti, treated as a message, can achieve in society. Thus, he argues that in societies where the access to public means of communication was limited and restricted due to authoritarian regimes such as dictatorships, graffiti was used as a medium for public opinion: ‘... what matters in the graffiti ‘point of view’ is its public display and therefore, the gaze of a legitimated citizen and not the one of an spectator’ (1987: 73).

Looking at the modern history of graffiti in the city in this way, we can see how it marks events and is marked by cultural upheavals and socio-economic circumstances. Three of these key moments in the twentieth century were: the May 1968 events in Paris and the use of graffiti as a political tool; the New York subway graffiti movement and its expansion and development during the 1980s towards art and the art market; and finally the use of graffiti in the 1980s and 1990s in Latin

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17 The reproductions of the mural have been carried out, according to representatives of the museum, through precise means (which is to say they have been reproduced following the guidance of artists and art historians), while trying to respect the urban nature and ephemeral features of the original piece and always in consultation with the Keith Haring Foundation.
American countries within an environment of social and political repression and conflicts. In these three cases, graffiti became a means of expression and communication for people who had limited means of making their voices heard. In these situations, graffiti became not only a tool for communication but also a tool for the activist to facilitate social cohesion and raise political awareness. As Silva (1987) claims and we will appreciate in the ethnographic sections of this thesis, graffiti is not only about reading images but also about apprehending actions: ‘...graffiti is written in movement and therefore we think in an action that carries out a writing or a kind of writing characterized by action’ (1987: 19).

The fact that graffiti artworks are made in public space raises questions about how visual forms express, and may construct, modes of sociality in the city. Although marginal in terms of their visibility graffiti images contest and compete with other images of the city. So what kinds of seeing are at stake in these images and how should we read them? I am not only looking at graffiti from an art historical perspective, in order to identify authorship and formal characteristics and to make classifications based on an understanding of aesthetics as a way of identifying artistic value. I am proposing an approach that draws on visual studies in terms of the visuality of graffiti and through approaches to the anthropology of art, aiming to show how graffiti is the expression of social, political and economic networks.

The review of some mainstream graffiti publications in which the design and display of images is given reign to dominate over their textual explanation is useful for thinking about how the modern history of graffiti is seen and related in popular books and for discussing themes about representation, aesthetics and commodification.

In ‘Graffiti Kings: New York City Mass Transit art of 1970s’, the historian and photographer Jack Stewart (2009), describes the birth of graffiti in the city of Philadelphia during the 1970s. He starts by addressing graffiti as an activity that gives visual expression to gangs’ territoriality and describes its later development in New York where it was transformed into the graffiti art movement. It was, he says, a spontaneous and youth oriented painting movement that is now practised worldwide. According to Stewart, these young people in New York transformed a
traditionally clandestine activity into something like commercial advertising. This was a process that evolved from ‘writing’ names and symbols with spray cans and markers on any public space surface to art-works on trains and later in galleries. This graffiti history is described in the book through a combination of textual readings and photographs. In the texts, he highlights the formal characteristics of the works, so that they can be treated and discussed in terms of aesthetics and in the same way as ‘artworks’. For example, he writes the following about Blade, one of the graffiti pioneers in New York between 1972 and 1984.

‘Blade’s first masterpiece, from the fall of 1972, was decorated with stars (192). There was little evidence in this awkward piece that he was concerned with the shape of the letters. The following year he started to experiment with bubble letters. He gave his pieces a personal twist by squaring the ends of the letters and putting a little angle on the stem of the d.” (Stewart 2009: 161).

In contrast to Stewart’s art-historical framing of graffiti the photographers Martha Cooper and Henry Chalfant (1984), who co-authored ‘Subway Art’, a landmark work about hip-hop culture focused on the graffiti in New York, used photography as a medium to explore the materiality of graffiti in the city. Their approach, which is closer to the visual studies frame of interpretation, looks at the graffiti artworks in their social and political context. Cooper represented through her photographic work a more complex reality formed by graffiti art works and the material and social landscape around them. Here it is possible to perceive different dimensions of graffiti and how they are part of a complex network and interplay of relations. In this way, the viewer has more room for interpretation and can contrast and make connections to other elements of the space surrounding graffiti. Graffiti works in the streets are presented as part of the whole space where they are located and not just limited to the frame of a wall as may be presented in a photograph. This
approach to graffiti and its representation reinforces the view that works of art are not only self-contained unities but ‘...are the product of specific historical practices and part of identifiable social groups in given conditions...’ (Wolff 1993:49). In the case of graffiti the material features of these works are also part of the urban context where they are produced. This makes it problematic to talk about graffiti in purely aesthetic terms. We need to think about graffiti as also being a product of economic, social and ideological factors. Cooper and Chalfant write about this as follows:

‘We realized that our ways of approaching graffiti were completely different and complementary, since Marty was a professional photographer and her photos revealed the ambience and the context of the art on the trains, while my method of photomontage emphasized the artworks themselves’ (Chalfant and Cooper 1984:7).

The different urban contexts where graffiti is produced open up different possibilities for looking at its visuality. Drawing on Chalfant and Cooper's work, I have tried in this study to address the different ways in which graffiti is made in Barcelona. This has allowed me to operate with a flexible model, which tackles the interdependence between urban contexts and surfaces, and the agencies of graffiti artists and their works.

I have also drawn from other related publications such as ‘Street Gallery: Guide to 1000 Los Angeles Murals’, in which the photographer and writer Robin J. Dunitz (1993) makes a historical and visual journey through the evolution of street murals in Los Angeles: from the New Deal Art projects during the depression time, passing through the city-sponsored mural projects linked to the Neighbourhood Pride Program, and finally arriving at the rising of aerosol and graffiti art. This narrative shows how street art has functioned as a 'multi-pronged tool' in the city (George
Other works, situated within the context of the civil rights movement in Los Angeles, African-American (Dunitz 1993) and Chicano artists (Holsher 1976) offer a useful comparative framework for understanding how the creation of murals is a means of reflecting on community history and the politics of racial and ethnic identities. The contrast here is with those other murals that are portrayed as a more stereotypical and narrow interpretations of history and the American way of Life. Taking these different types of murals together encloses, as Dunitz (1993) says, a vivid tale about the evolution of the Southern California society, representing ‘... a striking contrast of subject matters and attitudes, reflecting the persistence of American society’s sharper class and racial division’ (1993:12).

Here, it is necessary to emphasize how such artworks may act as recipients of alternative and counter narratives. The above examples of murals in Los Angeles represent various contexts where there was not only tension but also coexistence between different visualities. Thus the interactions between the different visualities at stake in a subject such as graffiti in Barcelona offer the possibility of exploring how public space is a lived space in the city and a different approach to understanding its historical transformations.

The question here is about how the visuality of the graffiti in Barcelona may enclose some specific features that are identifiable through comparison to ones found in other cities. Zosen, a veteran graffiti artist who is currently resident as an artist in the art centre of ‘La Escocesa’, explained to me how graffiti was created in a more ‘natural’ way in Barcelona than in other cities in Europe: ‘...here it was something that did not compete with the rest of the city landscape... probably, it was conditioned by the urban speculation and the transformation of neighbourhoods in the city centre such as ‘El Raval’. The people from Barcelona understood that rhythm in the city and took advantage of it to intervene in the public spaces and eventually create a recognized graffiti scene in the city’. These circumstances helped them to improve their muralist skills, evolve as artists and eventually achieve international recognition. Nowadays, everything is different: Zosen said, ‘...you can only paint on the metal shutters of the business...’. What are the reasons particular to Barcelona for the enforcement of public policies against graffiti and street art and are these
reasons linked to underlying antagonisms between economic and urban models in the city?

Generally, the content and practice of graffiti have been anti-mainstream and anti-authority, and this has resulted in a conception of its illegality and anti-social aspects. In this context, it is argued that there exists a conflict regarding aesthetics where graffiti and street artists challenge what Jeff Ferrell (1995) has defined as the ‘aesthetics of authority’ that govern the city. The practice of graffiti, continues Ferrell, is embedded in ‘a process of symbolic interactions’ between graffiti writers that fosters an alternative system of public communication (1995:83). Looking at the conflictive relationship in which graffiti always seems to be. Rafael Schacter (2008) compares the ‘aesthetics of the artists’ and the ‘aesthetics of authority’ to ‘uncover the underlying motivations and politics behind the act of erecting and erasing, graffiti and street art in the streets’ (2008:36). But does graffiti always exist within this tension between antagonistic visual cultures? Jeremy MacClancy (1997), analysing the use of art objects for contestatory purposes, states: ‘People’s ideas about the connections between persons and things are neither static nor politically innocent’ (1997:18). This statement could also be applied to people’s ideas about the space of graffiti and how both ‘things’ and spaces can have their own powers, which are shaped by sensorial and symbolic orders. Graffiti and street art are examples of this paradox in which a mosaic of perspectives about aesthetics, the uses of common space, politics and ownership are at play.

The local authorities and the graffiti writers have traditionally produced opposing meanings about graffiti. This has fostered debates about the features of graffiti and how it should be approached and conceived. In this conflictive context, it is easy to identify opposing views and meanings without paying too much attention to how these meanings have been created and the reasons behind them. This leads us to a book published by Cedar Lewisohn and the ‘Tate Modern’ in 2008 called ‘Street art: The Graffiti Revolution’. This work was developed from an art historical perspective but its scope is worldwide and it deals with not only graffiti but also street art. Its final goal was to establish the differences between what is
denominated graffiti and its evolution to another, according to his argument, more democratic phenomenon called street art:

"Street art is more about interacting with the audience on the street and the people, the masses. Graffiti isn't so much about connecting with the masses: it's about connecting with different crews, it's an internal language, it's a secret language. Most graffiti you can't even read, so it's really contained within the culture that understands it and does it. Street art is much more open. It's an open society" (Lewisohn 2008:15).

The first time that the term 'street art' appeared in print was in the book of that name by Allan Schwartzman in 1985. According to Lewisohn (2008), since then, ‘...many artists have been happy to be known as street artists’ (2008: 18). Lewisohn claims that the differences between graffiti and street art are grounded on the different ways that they connect with people. From this classification, street art is defined as an artistic and socially accepted phenomenon, which can even be exhibited in galleries and commercialized. On the other hand, graffiti is seen as a secret and internal language that is difficult to understand by the whole of society and is therefore rejected by the majority. Could this way of seeing graffiti as street art be a way towards commercialization or institutionalization?

2.4 Theorizing graffiti

In much of the research about graffiti as images, the researchers have theorized about the make up of specific social groups such as gangs (Phillips 1999, Kohl 1972), street artists (Castleman 1982, Lachman 1988, Droney 2010) and youth subcultures (Ferrel 2004, MacDonall 2001). The documentation and analysis of the images and the interaction and recording of interviews with their authors are the main methodologies for data collection in these works. Here the visuality of graffiti can be understood as a reflection of social forces. In this sense, the anthropologist Susan A. Philips (1999) states, in her study about graffiti gangs in L.A that ‘Graffiti allows people to create identity, share cultural values, redefine spaces and manufacture inclusive or exclusive relationships’ (1999:46). This way of seeing graffiti highlights the strength of graffiti images to create and at the same time separate social groups within the same society. Thus the graffiti made by gangs transmits fear to the majority of the population in LA, who link it to violence, and the destruction of gang behaviour. This raises questions about graffiti as a meaning bearing device and how people are able to read its signs and therefore identify
danger, violence and fear. What do people see in these images and how is this form of seeing graffiti images developed as part of social formations?

In the 1970s geographers such as David Ley and Roman Cybriwsky understood the creation of graffiti as behaviour linked to inhabitants from the city ghettos. In their landmark article 'Urban Graffiti as Territorial Markers' (1974), they studied graffiti in Philadelphia, the city that saw the birth of the modern graffiti movement. Here they used graffiti as a research tool to study social and economic processes connected to particular neighbourhoods. For these geographers, graffiti works were understood as geographical markers of particular territories made by street gangs and graffiti kings. They conceived these images as social indicators, which enclosed beliefs and ways of perception and they proposed to learn about graffiti by being able to read them as part of a behavioural environment. Applying ecological and behavioural approaches, graffiti was treated as a faithful source of information for knowing about those who produced them. But was that enough? Can we rely on the visual features of graffiti to know and theorize about the people, the space and the social and economic processes linked to its creation? This approach runs the risk of establishing a separation between the researcher and the graffiti artists within the city space they share, creating a strangely distanced situation, as Kohl (1972) realized: 'I have tried to look at the walls in the cities I inhabit as if I were a stranger who wanted to find out about the culture from the way in which the natives decorate their environment' (Kohl 1972:40).

I am not denying here that the visual features of graffiti provide us with information about the process of image making, the space where graffiti is created, the people who have produced it, and the different values that they share and transmit to the general public and the local institutions. However, I believe, that it is easy to be open to speculation if we do not pay attention to the wider circumstances that surround and condition the creation of graffiti in a particular city. Thus, I think it is necessary to look at graffiti as part of more complex and fluid situations, framed not only by the material act of their production but also by other factors such as local policies and urban renewals and the interrelationship between different visions of the city.
Such visions are increasingly commercial as Damien Droney (2010) argues. He sees the street art images created in the public space of LA as personal forms of communication that travel between street art subcultures and the world of marketing. In this context, Droney argues that ‘Marketers and artists alike are playing with the categories that define their artistic practice, and thus find mutual interest in creating ironic overlaps between two seemingly antagonistic vocations’ (2010:112). The idea of an ‘antagonistic vocation’ gives us an insight into the role of graffiti in urban subcultures and the position of these social groups within a broad notion of society (Droney 2010).

Theoretically speaking, graffiti has frequently been conceptualized in connection with urban subcultures as a form of visual resistance towards the mainstream or dominant culture (Ferrell 1995, Castleman 1982, Phillips 1999). But what is meant by subculture here? Many accounts of British and North American subcultures have highlighted a binary opposition, between subculture and mainstream culture, based on ideas of resistance between one and the other and materialized as alternative visual styles (Droney 2010). This implies an over-aestheticization of everyday life focused on the supremacy of the image in the culture. Geographically localized in the margins of the city and society, youth subcultures began by rejecting their own ‘parents culture’, which latterly became conceptualized by social researchers as forms of rebellion in working class youth movements. ‘Style became a form of resistance’ (Stahl 2003). In this vein it is argued that graffiti signs act as a means of communication for subculture members and represent new visual conventions that are different to the mainstream ones (Ferrell 1995, Phillips 1999).

Within the CCCS (Centre for Contemporary Culture Studies) approach, subcultures and their visual styles were conceived according to a ‘Gramscian semiotic’ (Droney 2010). Through this approach, subculture has been understood as a visual style that semiotically resists and subverts the hegemonic style of mainstream culture (Hebdige 1979). The subculture members resisted subordination to the hegemonic visual culture through ‘semiotic guerrilla warfare’ (Muggleton & Weinzierl 2003:4). In sum, subcultures and their styles were embedded in processes of resistance and filled with subversive potential. They were essentially defined according to the opposition between dominant and resistant views. Looking at graffiti as an
expression of subcultures, many have seen it as an artistic materialization of the
subversive potential of subculture. But what forms of authority do they resist and is
there a singular representation of that hegemonic authority?

As the above studies show, today graffiti is practised and interpreted in many
different ways. There is a wide and varied network of graffiti and street artists in
each city and they interact and communicate not only with each other locally and in
the urban space but also globally and virtually through digital means and the
internet. In addition, the content and nature of their interventions are not always
subversive and understood as a form of resistance towards a dominant and
hegemonic culture but travel within changing situations. Therefore, the boundaries
between subculture and mainstream culture are not so clear in regard to the
different contexts in which we can find graffiti and street art today. The emergence
in the 1990s of ‘post- subcultural studies’ established a different approach to the
study and understanding of subcultures. In contrast to the ‘heroic’ CCCS mode,
which is based on a semiotic approach, they proposed that the complexity and
shifting nature of the current subculture practices might be explained through a
dynamic framework, returning to sociological research approaches of ethnographic
and qualitative methodologies (Muggleton & Weinzierl :2003: 9).

Having a strong emphasis on the ethnographic process, Damien Droney (2010) and
Nancy Macdonald (2001) criticize the CCCS (Centre for Contemporary Culture
Studies) approach to subcultures, due to it being based on binary positions
between dominant and resistance culture. For Damien Droney (2010), the practice
of street art in L.A. is embedded in the marketing and advertisement world: ‘...street
artists navigate this subculture and the world of marketing producing irreverent
and self-contradictory artwork’ (2010:99). His analysis shows the complexity of the
street art and graffiti scene during the present time beyond simple dichotomies and
workings inside and outside of the mainstream culture.

With a different theoretical approach and focused on gender, Nancy Macdonald’s
(2001) study of graffiti in New York and London points out how young males build
their masculine identity and claim power within the graffiti subculture. Although
Macdonald considers this subculture as a closed entity, she also gives relevance to
the grounded experiences achieved in fieldwork. In this sense, she states that: ‘By making the actor/insider's voice and habitat its first port of call, ethnography fleshes out the fine-grained complexities of social life that other methods can sometimes miss’ (2001: 230). Nevertheless, she admits that her methods could not get deep into the sensory dimension of graffiti writers and she states that the outcome of her research: ‘is not going to drench [readers] in the emotional, sensory, bodily experience of graffiti writing’ (2001:12). She directs the readers to visual material such as photography and video to achieve that kind of bodily experience.

Given that this thesis aims to use photography and video to bring its readers inside the sensory realm of graffiti, how should we approach its bodily, experiential dimensions and inner emotional life? There is some literature about graffiti that attempts to find the psychological reasons behind the creation of these images. This literature departs from the assumption that the meanings of graffiti are explained through psychological anomalies linked to the individuals who create them. As part of this psychological approach to graffiti, anthropologists and folklorists such as Allen Walker Read (1935) and Alan Dundes (1966) have used Freudian analysis to theorize about taboo and dirt, looking at the graffiti drawn on bathroom walls. With them a new path was opened to study this subject. In this same direction, Robert Reisner (1971) also sought possible explanations of graffiti through psychiatric and psychological analysis. He thought that graffiti was linked to sexual repression and other emotional aspects of the people who produced it: ‘Graffiti, then are little insights, little peepholes into the minds of individuals who are spokesmen not only for themselves but for others like them’ (1971:1).

The fundamental goal of these psychological and psychiatric studies of graffiti was based on searching for the meanings linked to the creator's behaviour and asking questions such as whether they were produced as a form of exhibitionism of their makers or whether these behaviours were connected to the early childhood of their producers. These attempts, based on psychological and psychiatric analysis, failed to make links with the social and material worlds of the people who created the graffiti that they documented. This circumstance was partially conditioned by the anonymous nature of most of the graffiti that they were studying as well as by the
distant position of the researchers in connection to this kind of behaviour and the people who produced the graffiti, which brings us to the anthropological approaches that I draw from in this work in terms of theory and methodology.

In a theoretical sense, a departure point is the study by the psychiatrist Ben Lomas (1988), which has tried to shed more light on the social and cultural contexts of graffiti. ‘We can no more understand graffiti by separating them from the walls on which they appear than we can fully understand dreams by neglecting their obvious connection with sleep or comprehend jokes by ignoring the laughter they produce in the listener. It is this relation of the writer to the wall that holds the key to our investigation’ (Lomas 1973:88). Lomas’ symbolic and metaphoric conception of walls as material surfaces, for understanding the social and emotional context of graffiti is recognized by contemporary researchers as a key to studying graffiti. Walls achieve a symbolic dimension that can encapsulate separation and the division of people (Ferrell 1995), subversive and mainstream messages (Droney 2010), and rights of possession and property (Phillips 1999). The anthropologist Susan A. Phillips (1999) describes how gang members in Los Angeles used the term 'Wallbangin' when they either wrote or crossed out the graffiti writing of others ‘but always to enforce relationships of power between gangs’ (1999:21). The graffiti walls, therefore, are charged with meanings linked to multiple relations around them.

Debbie Leslie (2006) states, in relation to the murals in Belfast, that the walls are part of ‘wider networks’ of ‘production, signification and reception’ (2006: 27) and critiques the over simplification of the ‘two-community thesis’ based on the understanding of the murals in Belfast as an exclusive ideological expression of two communities, loyalist and republican. As part of this debate about the symbolic dimension of the murals in Belfast, Neil Jarman (1998) states that as artefacts or material objects, the murals in Belfast require a wider interpretation ‘...of the area beyond the immediate frame or edge of the wall...’ and in connection to its location ‘...requires awareness of the physical and social environment in which the images are produced with which they interact’ (Jarman 1998: 1-2).
Throughout my fieldwork, I identified how the walls of the squatted buildings, as I will explain in more detail in chapter four, achieved multiple functions through the creation of graffiti murals. They expressed political statements; they acted as signs of identity to visualize the squatter movement in the city; and they were also used as instruments to interact with the inhabitants of the city and to mediate between graffiti and street artists through collective artworks. In general, the symbolic dimension of the graffiti walls in Barcelona changed after the ‘civic law’ was passed in 2006 when the access to the walls in the city started to be restricted and many of the walls, which were usually used by graffiti artists, disappeared. All of the walls of the city then became more inaccessible to graffiti artists than ever before. This situation transformed some of them into battlefields where graffiti images were used as weapons to achieve control. In addition, the control over some walls, like those in ‘Las Tres Chimenes’ in the neighbourhood of ‘Poble Sec’, was given by the council to street art associations, which would manage when they were painted and how. This situation, as we will see in chapter six, also fostered a great deal of conflict but this time the conflict was even between members of the local graffiti and street art scene. In this context and following Lomas’ (1988) argument, the relationship between the walls and the graffiti artists is a key factor for understanding the graffiti and street art social environment and to explain how it is part of wider networks in the city.

In this chapter, we have been thinking about graffiti in visual terms as a system of communication shaped by private, ‘public’ (institutionalized) and collective interests. The potential of graffiti and street art as a communicative means that uses public space as an interface to make political claims and foster interactions with the general audience, art institutions and other street artists posits a semiotic model that addresses graffiti as part of a system of visual signs and social interactions. To explore this system of visual signs in which graffiti can be read from the surfaces of the city and apprehended by the literal and metaphoric presence of walls it is necessary to get into the debate about graffiti as a representation and the aesthetic classification of differences between graffiti and street art.
2.5 Graffiti as Art

The kind of cultural and ideological conditions that underpin the aesthetic contradictions expressed by walls that are at work are underlined by Stuart Plattner (1996) in his work ‘High Art Down home’ about the art market’s key participants in the St. Louis art scene ‘...art is sold like a commodity but is produced like a religious calling, as an object of intense personal expression (1996:23)’. This paradox is useful for understanding how street art objects, which are sold as commodities on the walls of galleries, are generally categorized as democratic, spontaneous and free art exhibited in public streets. Thereby, it could be argued that as the internal and secret language of the youth subcultures, graffiti has ended up being codified by local councils and galleries into a language that is understood as illegal and legal in public space and sellable in galleries as street art. In this process of codification, graffiti has missed part of its antagonist and critical strength. In Barcelona, the graffiti artists face a paradox: do they want to be criminalized by the local authorities if they practise graffiti without authorization in public space or do they prefer to follow the processes established by the council and apply for permits and paint only on specific surfaces of the city?

This tension between the graffiti and street art images, in terms of their readability as signs, raises questions about the role of graffiti and street art in the city. Are they a socially engaged form of public art and therefore managed by local institutions or are they a tool for critical communication and alternative forms of expression in public space?
Rephrasing these questions within modernist theoretical frameworks, I ask: is the street art in Barcelona part of Debord’s ‘society of spectacle’ (1994 [1931]) or can it be in contrast, as Walter Benjamin (2008 [1934]) predicted, after the decay of the aura of art, a political tool for the community? Artist and community are often reduced to particular cultural identities, based on parameters of authenticity and on the guarantee of support and mediation through institutional relations. Hence, it is possible that an artist may be asked to stand in for the identity of a community and to represent it institutionally. The question at stake here is how is the street art in Barcelona appropriated by economic imperatives and institutional strategies and how is it an alternative and transgressive phenomenon? At the time of this research the graffiti and street artwork in public space is not only ephemeral and uncommissioned but also commissioned, regulated and sometimes even permanent. Can we look at the graffiti and street art in Barcelona as part of both the uncommissioned city and the legislated city?

Barcelona offers an important scenario in which to study the transitional stages of graffiti from ephemeral to permanent and from free and spontaneous artworks to commoditized art and institutionalized public art.
There are different understandings of material objects that are at stake here, which can be approached through studies within the anthropology of art and other disciplines such as art history and visual culture. Looking at graffiti artworks as subjectivized and animated objects can be a way to explore the meanings of these images within the everyday life of a city. On this basis, graffiti artworks are personal and collective forms of communication, which carry, as W.J.T. Mitchell (2005) claims about images, social or psychological power. Thus, he states, it is not difficult to demonstrate that the idea of the personhood of pictures exists not only in traditional societies but also in the modern world (2005: 32). Using Mitchell’s question, I could ask: what does graffiti want? In terms of my research, my desire is that graffiti wants to tell its story. This is something that is not accessible simply by looking at it. Why and how did graffiti works end up on the city walls? And are these images artworks? These were some of the additional questions that I wanted to ask to the graffiti images. Thus in my ethnography graffiti images enclose a narrativized network of individual ‘stories’ shaped by objective and subjective elements.

The graffiti artists localized the graffiti images on the walls of the cities and therefore out of the art world spaces such as museums and galleries. However many of these images are looked at by the inhabitants of the city as artworks in the streets. As Mitchell (2005) states, ‘… sometimes the expression of a want signifies lack rather than the power to command or make demands’ (2005:38). In this sense, it could be argued that graffiti images, which are created and considered not to be art images, could want to signify the opposite and therefore want to be art. Something that these images do not avoid is their interpretation as signs within the public space of a city. Thus the graffiti images exist between different visual imageries of the city space and are not only the subject of discussions and debates but also the object of different actions from other graffiti artists, the inhabitants and the institutions of the city. I argue that graffiti images do not want to be reduced to works of art or not art but they must be approached as part of the complex and inter-subjective context of the city in which they are located. As Mitchell (2005) posits, images want to be asked, what do they want? And as an anthropologist, I am looking at graffiti images as textures and questioning how they
live and are experienced as part of the historical, sensorial and political order of Barcelona.

The graffiti image, therefore, is approached in this research as a reflexive tool to explore other kind of images such as the image of the city or the image as a work of art. Mitchell’s question, what do pictures want? is a question of desire that allows us to explore distinct perspectives towards these images and how they are embodied and form part of different life processes in the city. This implies looking not only at the creation and existence of the graffiti images in the city but also at their destruction and how these different processes are grounded in experiences and collective representations. Applying this approach to my own research, I have aimed to overcome the formal distinctions between graffiti and street art and question what these images want within different contexts. This approach to studying images, which Mitchell (2005) refers as a ‘third way’, is based on Nietzsche’s strategy of ‘sounding the idols’ with the ‘tuning fork’. Mitchell defines it as a way of playing upon the images without destroying them but making them sound and eventually speak (2005: 27). Making an analogy with the practice of graffiti, I understand Mitchell’s strategy not only as a way of playing upon images but also as a way of playing with images. Thus in pursuing an ethnographic question about the capacity of adaptation among graffiti artists in Barcelona, I discovered how graffiti artists played with different ways of producing images and how this was intertwined with the perception of city space over time.

The graffiti images on walls, the practices in public space and the conception of art appear intertwined in the graffiti texture that I am trying to represent. This investigation takes places within the particular textural art history of Barcelona. These textures have been materialized in the work of artists such as Picasso, Miró or Tápies, which are charged with aesthetics and politics meanings and have established ways of seeing art in the city and the city as art.
The work of the artist Antonio Tápies is a good example for looking at the relationship between art, walls and graffiti in Barcelona. One of Tápies’ main sources of artistic inspiration has been the walls of Barcelona. Growing up in Barcelona, Tápies experienced the city walls as both: ‘... a cultural identity and a tableau on which the daily violence of fascist oppression was inscribed and memorialized in the 1930s-1940s’ (Irvine 2012:246). In his essay ‘Communication on the wall’, Tápies (1969) states that this situation added to the influence of the graffiti photographs of Brassai and the art visions of the Dada movement meant that many of his first artworks in 1945 had ‘... something to do with the street graffiti and with all the repressed protest world, clandestine, but full of life that also circulated through the walls of my country’ (1969:2). Thus the walls in Tápies’ art universe are not simply material barriers. They also enclose multiple symbolic meanings: from being sources of inspiration linked to collective memory, repression and everyday life to mediums and ends of personal and artistic process in which according to Tápies his painting ‘... had turned into walls’ (Tápies 1969).

This makes us think about processes of transformation in relation to artworks, which turn into walls in the ‘intramural’ art space of galleries, studios or collections and walls that can become artworks in the ‘extramural’ non-art spaces of the streets (Irvine 2012).

In the field of the anthropology of art there are studies that tackle similar questions. For example, Fred Myers (2006) analyses the different anthropological discourses produced in regard to Australian aboriginal acrylic paintings. The production of Pintupi paintings derives from aboriginal ceremonial designs and rock paintings associated with myths and performance of rituals. Today, they are also a source of economic income for the Pintupi community, a sign of self-
determination and cultural identity, a right of place and a commodity in the art market. Myers states that the Aboriginal paintings must be understood as a form of cultural production, which encloses a plurality of meanings. Aboriginal artists claim that their paintings come ‘from the dreaming’ of their ancestors while anthropologists have also defined them according to the political discourse of ‘nationalism’ and the spiritual and aesthetic one of ‘modernism’ (Myers 2006: 502).

I find certain parallels between these Aboriginal paintings and the street art created in Barcelona. Indeed, both are means of visual expression that enclose a mosaic of meanings conditioned by spaces, people and the art market. On the one hand, there is the original context framed by myths and rituals created and performed by people who belong to a specific community and, on the other hand, there is the art world (art historian, collectors, art critics) and the art market context, which is conditioned by the process of commodification and discourses developed by people who normally belong to other communities. The art context or the art world as Becker (1982) claims, ‘make art’ through the involvements of curators, collectors, artists, academics, institutions and so on. These social networks, however, are not devoid of sensibilities towards different forms of cultural activity (Myers 2006: 507). In this sense, if I want to represent the street art created in Barcelona, I need to look at it in different contexts, the ‘original’ context expressed on the street of the city, which is based on relationships between graffiti artists, street art associations and the local council, and the context created for the “art world” market, which is expressed in other contexts such as art centres and galleries.

Following the parallels of my research with that carried out by Myers about Aboriginal rock and acrylic painting, I have asked how the street art is embedded in the textured social networks and visual culture of the city. The graffiti artists that I met and interviewed, as we will appreciate in the following ethnographic chapters, accepted the ephemerality of their works. However, this feature motivated them to search for spaces and times in the city in which to materialize their works and make them last in the streets for as long as possible. The ephemeral quality of graffiti implies therefore looking at the city and their artworks in specific ways.
2.6 Methodology of studying graffiti textures

My experience as an ethnographer was used as a method to embody the sensory dimension of what others might experience to produce academic knowledge (Hockey 2006, Russell 1999, Pink 2009). These ethnographic experiences took place in three situations that sometimes overlapped with each other and in which I adopted different roles as an ethnographer: being an observer, a collaborator and a producer of graffiti and street art images. Thus I interacted and engaged in dialogue with graffiti artists in the art centre of ‘La Escocesa’, sharing and contrasting my anthropological knowledge with them. This fostered group conversations in which different artists and I shared views about the public space in Barcelona and the practice of graffiti and street art over time. In addition, I also had the opportunity to observe and film how they worked in their studios, organized a street art festival in the centre and painted the outside walls. These were dialogues that mediated social relations not only through talking but also through graffiti actions.

Applying a phenomenological model, the experiences of the everyday activities of the streets have been conceptualized by many academics as multisensory and not dominated or reduced to the visual sense as merely the operation of sight. Here, I follow the approach to vision of Cristina Grasseni (2004) ‘... not as a disembodied ‘overview’ from nowhere, but as a capacity to look in a certain way as a result of training the body’ (2004:41). Thus the knowledge linked to graffiti and street art is not only produced by visual language but is also embodied through the involvement of other senses, and of the practice of body movements as part of the understanding of the city. In saying this I argue that the urban space is shaped by the movement of bodies within it, which creates a sense of plurality. This has been
defined by Vanessa Chang (2013) as ‘embodied multiplicity' (2013:215) and I have explored this idea through the approach of the anthropologist Andrew Irving (2007) in his research ‘Ethnography, art and death’. Here he has applied an interdisciplinary approach between ethnography, art and performance based on the creation of new forms of collaborative research and representation (2007: 185). His method involves the creation of walking dialogues to explore the city space in connection with personal memories, emotions and social life. Irving's example shows how the city is not only based on architecture, statistics, maps and demographic hard elements but it also has a soft and fragmented side that is imagined and perceived by its inhabitants. To explore this experiential dimension of graffiti I have, like Irving, engaged in a bodily way with the practice of my subjects, not only by walking (as I outline below), but also through graffiti and street art practices and collaborations. Here, my body has become a means to explore the city space, the graffiti practice and how both are embedded in the everyday life of Barcelona.

Drawing an analogy between Situationist theories and graffiti and street artists’ interventions became a useful strategy to explain some themes of resistance (Droney 2010:102) and explore methodologies to experience and represent the city. The Situationist International was a multidisciplinary group of revolutionary artists and theorists formed in the 1950s and 1960s, who sought to change the everyday life of ordinary citizens into a world of experiment, anarchy and play (Sadler 1998:76). Their ideal city was based on the interferences of situations, which contain connections between geographical space and history, politics, the economy, and more importantly the inhabitants and their lived experiences. I put into practice some of the Situationist’s methodologies to experience and represent the city, such as the ‘derive’, the ‘détournement’ and the ‘psychogeography’ analysis. Thus I walked in a ‘derive’ mode, without any particular direction, through different neighbourhoods of the city, taking notes of the contrast in street moods, different illuminations and people, and looking for graffiti and street artworks. Later this information was used to create my questions in the dialogues with the graffiti artists. I was walking routes with my participants or just by myself using my video camera to record them. I also used the method of ‘détournement’ in
my collaboration with Teo as I will describe in my next chapter, transforming conventional photographs into street artworks and then street artworks images into anthropological knowledge. In this respect, the ‘sensescape’ (Simon Guy 2012) of the city becomes an important subject for the investigation of the relationship between citizens and their material world. Simon Guy (2012) argues that the concept of “sensescape” ’…enables an interrogation of everyday life that incorporates the meeting of mind, body and environment’ through interdisciplinary sensory studies. The smell linked to a particular area of the city, the darkness of certain streets and the visual signs or paintings on its walls form part of what it is defined as ‘sensescapes’ or ‘sense of place’.

Finally, in the presentation of this ethnography I have reassembled the graffiti and street art images that I produced as part of short videos, time-lapse, sound recording and photographs. In this way, I incorporated into my own research not only the artworks of the street artists but also an alternative cartography of the city produced by my own interaction with the city space. Throughout this process, the visual material of the street artworks was transformed into recorded anthropological visual materials. This allowed me to reconfigure and decontextualize the graffiti and street artworks to foster a communicative encounter between different viewing subjects. This methodology was based on the exploration of different forms of representation and an interaction with the space and was inspired by the strategies used by the artists with whom I collaborated in my fieldwork. The result is a compilation of visual material that as I said in the introduction of this thesis I have edited together to create an interactive video called ‘Walking in Barcelona’.

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18 http://www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/research/marc/research/projects/senses/
Chapter 3: Tactile encounters and the ephemerality of the graffiti image
3.1. Introduction

‘Guy Debord posited that ‘the primarily urban character of the drift, in its element in the great industrially transformed cities, could be expressed in Marx’s phrase- ‘Men can see nothing around them that is not their own image; everything speaks to them of themselves. Their very landscape is alive’ (Sadler 1998:15).

Graffiti appears and disappears in the streets of the city fostering different kinds of tactile encounters. These encounters can be approached through a visual anthropology that is of and by the senses, and thus conceiving of graffiti images as ‘corporeal images’ (MacDougall 2006). Following David MacDougall ‘we see with our bodies and any image that we make carries the imprint of our body’ (2006:4). Graffiti images are not only images made by other bodies but also images made by the way in which we interact with them using our own bodies and this mediates their relationship with the world. Clearly, the creation and perception of graffiti produce multiple actions and reactions along the periods of their existence. In this research, these actions and reactions are not only identified and localized within particular and isolated social networks such as members of gangs, graffiti crews or graffiti removal teams, but they are also embedded in bodies and materials in motion.

With the project *Haciendo la Calle*, “Making the Street”, I embodied the practice of street art in the city space of Barcelona. This possibility came out of my collaboration with the photographer Teo Vazquez. Teo, in his project ‘Making the street’, was using photography to create iconic images of street workers in the city. The subjects of his photographs were people involved in illegal activities in public space such as selling beers, sunglasses or women’s handbags; providing sexual services or playing music without a permit. They were also part of the socioeconomic urban landscape of the city providing services to local people and tourists. Through his project, Teo wanted to highlight this contradiction. The photographs were created in collaboration with street workers who became images of satirical, comical and exaggerated situations. For our collaboration, we transformed some of Teo’s photographs into black and white A0 format prints;

19 http://www.teovazquez.com/
then we trimmed them leaving only the shape of the characters and finally we pasted them onto different walls of the city and filmed the whole process.

Within the street art world, this practice is called ‘pasting’ and it was inspired, in our case, by the work of the French contemporary street artist JR. In his projects, JR mixes photography and street art pasting large-scale photographs on the walls of cities worldwide. He tries to give visibility and voice to the subjects of his photographs and produce alternative representations of them in contrast to those provided through mainstream media channels. This posits a paradox between the self-promotion of street artists and the collaborative and critical nature of his artistic practices in public space.

In the 'Inside out project',\(^{20}\) which has developed since 2011 on a global scale, JR gives everyone the opportunity to share their portraits and transform messages of personal identity into works of public art. Meanwhile in 'Unframed,'\(^{21}\) another of his projects that began in 2009, he also deals with social memory, transforming archive photographs into public art.

\(^{20}\) http://www.insideoutproject.net/en/about
\(^{21}\) http://www.jr-art.net/projects/unframed-vevey
JR and many of the artists who I knew in Barcelona proposed, through their artworks, a different image of the city than the one mediated through capitalist institutions and advertisements. This view mirrors the Situationist theories about capitalism and how the image mediated under capitalism portrays a false and inauthentic life (Debord 1994[1931]; Knabb 1981; Sadler 1998). Members of the Situationist movement used the technique of ‘détournement’ to transcend conventionalism and create new meanings through means of communication and interaction with the city space. I applied the method of ‘détournement’ to explore the meanings associated with graffiti and street art in public space and its relationship with institutions such as galleries and Barcelona’s council. In these contexts, I applied the idea of ‘détournement’ as a methodology in two directions: firstly as a way of interacting with public space and its elements to embody and produce street artworks. In this project, it implied searching for places, choosing the right time for the interventions and learning throughout this process how to make your artwork visible and long-lasting in the streets. The approach changed when I used my camera as a tool to represent our interventions in public space as ‘corporeal images’ that ‘...are not just images of other bodies; they are also images of the body behind the camera and its relation with the world’ (MacDougall 2006:3). In these processes, the use of the sound recording, video and photographic camera acted as an extension of my body to explore and represent the urban landscape of Barcelona.

Throughout this process, the urban landscape was transformed into the graffiti texture. It allowed me to be in touch not only with the material qualities of the different surfaces on which we pasted our photographs but also with the practices by which we interacted with those surfaces. Throughout my fieldwork, I identified how graffiti and street art was practiced within different social environments and not always within the anti-authority and antisocial alternative system of public communication. This made it possible to find street artworks that had been socially recognized or rejected and institutionally approved or erased. I argue that graffiti is shared and rejected as part of Barcelona's everyday life, travelling between the ‘aesthetic’ and the ‘anaesthetic’ of the city. Here I follow Walter Benjamin’s understanding of ‘aesthetic’ as a form of cognition based on the ‘sensory experience
of perception’ (Benjamin in Buck-Morss 1992:6). Thus the public spaces contain smells, images, tactile encounters, soundscapes and tastes. But how is this human sensorial realm created? In Benjamin’s terms the project of modernity and its new technologies began to shape the human experiences in the city as ‘mass culture’. This implies a transformation of aesthetics from a cognitive form of being ‘in touch’ with the space, its people and memories to a way of manipulating and impoverishing the sensorial experiences. Benjamin calls this manipulation, as I mentioned in chapter one, ‘phantasmagoria’22 and as Susan Buck-Morss (1992) says, it has ‘anesthetic’ effects over the organisms, ‘...not through numbing but through flooding the senses’ (1992: 22). It is within this ocean of sensory inputs that graffiti and street art appears and disappears in public space.

Using Benjamin’s idea of phantasmagoria applied to a modernized city, I argue that graffiti artists can reduce its anaesthetic effects by being in touch, to produce their works, with a diversity of surfaces in the city. This corporal relation with the materiality of the city is embodied and experienced through painting. The textures of the wall surfaces become one of the main stimuli for graffiti artists. The textures that stimulate the painting of a quick tag in Barcelona can be found in a diversity of surfaces such as a metal business shutter, the cement surface of any urban furniture or in the plastic box that surrounds an electric meter. Even if the tags are generally small signatures, graffiti artists’ aim is that they will last in the urban space for as long as possible. This means that for experienced graffiti artists, choosing the right surface with the appropriate texture is not a random task. Teo and I learnt this throughout the development of our project, as I will explain later in this chapter. For graffiti artists the textures of the wall surfaces in the city have meanings, which offer them different possibilities to develop their works. I observed that in Barcelona they usually avoid painting on surfaces where their works were erased soon afterwards, such as the walls of official or corporate buildings. Graffiti, as James Elkins (1999) states about painting, is both the object on the wall of a city, with its different meanings linked to institutional regulations,

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22 For Benjamin the idea of phantasmagoria was linked to the experience of intoxication of the reality in the city. In Passagen-Werk, Benjamin describes this idea of phantasmagoria in public space in connection with the Paris shopping arcades and the World Fairs and how both fostered fictional experiences of reality (Benjamin in Buck-Morss 1992:22).
art theories and graffiti crew relations; and the actual action and experience that make that object visible -‘Paint incites motions, or the thought of motions, and through them it implies emotions and other wordless experiences’ (1999: 193).

Applying Elkins’ (1999) work, ‘What painting is’ to graffiti, I question what is thinking in the practice of graffiti? And this led me to explore its material memories, get immersed in its substances and question how they form part of corporeal experiences of painting graffiti. For instance, on the walls of Barcelona on which graffiti is allowed, we find surfaces formed by a thick multi-layered texture formed by an overlapping of graffiti murals. The process of painting a new mural on these walls began by erasing the previous ones, normally by covering them with white plastic paint applied with a paint roller. Some of the graffiti artists that I interviewed complained about the limited adherence of this kind of multi-layered texture. Therefore, they also scraped the wall before they painted it. The possibility of painting these walls with official authorization, as I will explain in chapter six, gives graffiti artists more time to spend on the walls to produce more elaborate works. Being in contact with the wall implied, most of the time, being very close to it and not looking at what was happening around them. This immersion into the walls can have different levels of depth, depending on the kind of work painted: scale, authorized or not, individual or collective.

Most of the authorized graffiti works are painted in groups, during daylight and in public space. This creates a kind of festive environment that attracts the curiosity of pedestrians who normally stop to take photographs and interact with the artists. Some of the artists also wear protective masks, which, in addition to protecting them from breathing the toxic aerosol fumes, isolate them within their own process of painting. In this sense, the scale of the graffiti works plays an important role in the relationship between the graffiti artists and their way of painting. The use of ladders or any other object found in the public space to reach the higher parts of the walls is something common in the practice of graffiti. Here graffiti artists find themselves separated from the shared street ground. It is in the painting of great scale murals that this separation and the closeness of the graffiti artists to the walls are more marked. I had the opportunity to be close to the painting of great scale
murals on different walls and observed different techniques for moving over the
surface. In the squatted building of ‘La Carboneria’, as I will explain in chapter four,
the graffiti artists used ropes and harnesses in order to hang in the air and in the
mural festival of ‘La Escocesa’, they used mobile elevators or set up scaffoldings.
The experience of painting, in these cases, implied a great interconnection between
the practice of painting and the texture and dimension of the surfaces. As Rothko
stated in an interview about his large canvases, they put the viewers inside the
work: ‘you are in it... it isn’t something you command’ (Rothko in Elkins 2001:18).
Rothko’s statement is not only applied to the viewers of these graffiti murals but
also to the people who paint them on the city’s surfaces, who also live in the cities.
They end up being part of the material surface of the city through the
materialization of their expressive gestures of painting. The textures of the city in
which they paint are imbricated in the texture of their paintings.

Probably the great scale mural is the maximum expression of graffiti at the
collective level in relation to a movement that has been able to find its space in the
city. In addition, at an individual level, graffiti artists who have achieved the skills
to do it paint the great scale mural. But as Elkins (1999) questions, ‘what happens
when paint moves across a blank painting?’ (1999: 192) and what are the
‘sustances’ used by graffiti artists to create their works? Looking again at the
painting of large scale graffiti murals but taking a micro perspective approach to
this practice, I am going to describe some of the specific mediums and expressive
gestures that I observed throughout some moments of my fieldwork.

The use of spray paint cans as the main medium to paint graffiti had multiple
functions: as a way to fill up large portions of walls in a short period of time, as a
tool to create precise details with fine lines and as an object when graffiti artists
use the edges of the can to scratch and spread the sprayed paint on the wall. During
the painting of a mural in the neighbourhood of ‘Vallcarca’, I observed how Sendys,
one of the veteran graffiti artists of the city, had tremendous control of the spray
cans. He could paint all kinds of details, shades and forms with them, achieving
hyper-realistic results. The movement of his body, bending up and down, right and
left, alongside the stretching of his arm and more specifically the movement of his
wrist, produced different kinds of effects giving shape to images with extraordinary lines and a great variety of colour tones. This range of movements started with the shaking of the spray can, which was adjusted with the sound of the plastic balls (pea) inside it, followed by the continuous sound of spraying. Then the smell of the toxic fumes took over the space around the wall. The floor next to the mural was normally covered by a great variety of spray paint cans (Hardcore, MTN94, Speed...) of different colours and pressure (high and low). In addition, the cans were used with different interchangeable caps (valves). In this improvised studio in the streets, the graffiti artists also used plastic paint to create backgrounds or to paint the master lines of the mural. The use of new materials and techniques such as those corporally developed by experienced graffiti artists like Sendys and others materially developed like the stencils, pasting posters or stickers are key to understand how graffiti is practised and in its continuous process of adaptation to the changeable city space and its regulations.

### 3.2 Collaborative street art

Much of the graffiti that we see in cities today is quite different to that described by the photographers, writers and researchers who studied this subject forty years ago. The reasons for this could be based on the fact that graffiti has changed over time or on the possibility that in reality what we are now seeing in the streets is not graffiti but street art. Here, I am more interested in exploring how graffiti or street art makes a certain kind of public space in Barcelona where there is a tension between the inscription of a visual language and the readability of images. What is the internal language of the public space in Barcelona and how are the graffiti images (graffiti or street art) read as part of this language?
In Spain, the art platform ‘La Galería de la Magdalena’ develops collaborative art projects in public space. In the ‘Encajados’ project, Isa and Reichel, the two architects from Madrid who founded this art platform, proposed the appropriation and regeneration of an abandoned building site in the street of ‘Canvis Nou’ in the central district of ‘Ciutat Vella’ in Barcelona. To do that, they collaborated with the local photographer Sr. Lorenzo/Joan Tomás and other artists and associations from the city. As Reichel and Isa said ‘...this project, as with the rest that we have developed, tried to bind together the people with the space and with the artists involved in the project fostering emotional links between all the participants’. In the project in Barcelona, they improvised in the street a photographic mini studio, made out of a cardboard box, where everyone could be encajado, “framed”, and photographed by Sr. Lorenzo. These photographs were later printed and pasted onto the walls of the building site where they decided to intervene. Before pasting, the space was cleaned and the walls were restored and painted. This practice and the collaborations between the participants transformed the unused space into an open-air gallery for the enjoyment and participation of everyone.

The collaborative nature of this art project raises questions not only about its artistic identity and authorship (Lind 2007), but also, as Bishop (2006) argues, about socially engaged collaborative art. As Bishop states, ‘it is also crucial to discuss, analyze and compare such work critically as art’ (2006: 180). I observed in the ‘Encajados’ project that the collective, which comprised architects, graffiti artists, the photographer and other participants and collaborators, was self-organized, self-founded and critical of the general economic and political order of the city. The actions that transformed this space were performed without any authorization and transgressed the council’s regulations. In addition, the fact that the intervention was developed in an unused building site addressed, in critical and constructive ways, the economic crisis and the urban speculation in the city. This physical space also became a virtual space on the internet through the visualization of their interventions. As they explained to me, they conceived of their projects as experimental, multidimensional and open to different possibilities and

23 http://lagaleriademagdalena.com/
24 http://lagaleriademagdalena.com/tag/encajados/
25 http://www.joantomasfotografia.com/
collaborations. Teo, who knew Joan Tomás, the photographer of the project, was invited to participate and paste one of his images onto the walls of the street gallery.

The so-called ‘social turn’, which is linked to ‘collective’, ‘dialogic’ and ‘relational’ art, posits the idea of socially and collaborative engaged art, which, much of the time is developed in public space (Bishop 2006). For some this approach to contemporary art offers an alternative to the individualism of the art world (Kester 2004) while for others it can result in the opposite of what it tries to react against (Lind 2009:53) and become an institutional tool for the system. Thus social/relational art is generally opposed to other forms of art, which are socially antagonistic, uncomfortable and individualistic. The ‘social turn’ in contemporary art could be identified with the turn in graffiti that I call the ‘street art turn’. The question here, is if socially accepted ‘street art’ is a kind of ‘domesticated’ graffiti and could graffiti as ‘street art’ and socially engaged art limit or displace other kinds of graffiti and art expressions?

Claire Bishop (2006), making reference to Rancière, claims that the basis of the art system is grounded on the confusion between art’s autonomy and heteronomy. Thus, Bishop says, ‘for Rancière the aesthetic doesn’t need to be scarified at the altar of social change, as it already inherently contains this ameliorative promise’ (2006: 183). The fact that graffiti in Barcelona is only allowed on specific walls, in connection with street art associations, and is supervised and controlled by the local council and galleries shapes not only the position of graffiti but also its language in the city. This means, however, not only a domesticated graffiti language
but also the development of new critical and alternatives forms of graffiti and street art.

Our collaborative project ‘Making the street’ was inspired by the examples cited above. My involvement in this project allowed me not only to practice street art in Barcelona but also to explore its surfaces and public space through collaborative working relationships. Thus, Teo’s photographs based on collaborations with street workers of Barcelona ended up intertwined with my own interest in the use of public space and its different surfaces. To establish the link between graffiti and street artworks and the experience of the city has been one my main aims in this research.

When Teo and I had our first meeting and shared our different views about the use of public space in Barcelona, we agreed to create a collaboration fuelled by his photographic art project and my anthropological research. This common project became the arena for experimenting and exchanging ideas on the practice of street art, ways of filming and modes of representation. We began to plan our interventions, searching for possible locations and giving form to our collaboration. The process activated what Ranciére (2004) calls ‘aesthetic experiences’, in which the collaboration between anthropology and, in this case, photography and street art, is shaped by the redistribution of the roles and positions of each collaborator. This resulted in an alternative spatial configuration of the fieldwork, which allowed for a politics of collaboration between different ‘worlds’ based on ‘…anarchic disruption of the anthropological’ (Strohm 2012: 119).
In ‘Making the Street’, I followed how Teo’s photographs went through different processes of transformation from the printer to the locations in the city space and from a conventional photograph to a street artwork. These transformations were inserted in public space through my collaboration in these networks (street worker and photographer) and my embodied participation. The experience and practice of these transformations and the existence of these images in the city were recorded in different forms such as interviews, video recordings and soundscapes. This information was later edited in a video, which formed part of the exhibition of Teo’s project at the art gallery ‘La Escalera de Incendios’ and it is included in this thesis as part of the DVD ROM ‘Walking in Barcelona’. The video represented the process of image making in connection with our journey in the city as a dynamic and juxtaposed dimension to the static nature of the photographs. The project gave me the opportunity to examine my position as both anthropologist and subject in my own research. This implied the crossing of boundaries between the observer and the observed and allowed me to perform the role of street artist in public space.

To organize our interventions and record them on video we split our roles. Teo was in charge of the pasting of the photographs onto the walls while I watched to check that there were no police around and filmed the whole intervention with my camera. The photographs appeared on the walls of the city as representations of street workers, which tried to awake the curiosity of, and foster an interaction with, the inhabitants. Hence the photographs were taken, selected and edited by Teo but inspired and incorporated into public space and its everyday life through an interaction with other people. The description of some of the various interventions that we carried out in different locations in Barcelona shows how the ‘stories’ of each street artwork were shaped by the involvement of different participants within inter-subjective spaces.

26 [http://escaleradeincendios.com/](http://escaleradeincendios.com/)
Looking at another of my street art ‘stories’ in the city is a useful way to understand the symbolic and mutable dimensions of the graffiti texture in Barcelona.

In the neighbourhood of ‘El Carmel’ up in the mountains of Barcelona and almost erased but still visible on a containment wall, is one of the political murals painted by members of the PCC *Partido de los Comunistas Catalanes*, “Catalonian Communist Party”, during the transition to democracy in Spain. In 2009, the internationally recognized Italian street artist Blu27 created next to it, on the same wall, one of his murals, which was commissioned by Barcelona’s art Festival ‘Influencers’. The new mural represents a gigantic shark with skin made out of green 100 Euros notes and a big open mouth with sharp teeth, which is bolting the old PCC mural. This case opens up multiple interpretations and shows how we need to approach graffiti not only in connection with its content but also by making reference to its use and how the inhabitants interpret and embody it as part of their environment. It is necessary to allow graffiti and street artworks to open up ‘stories’ and reflect the textures and flow of the city (Loeffler 2012).

Teo and I tried to add another layer to the murals described above and we pasted one of his photographs close to the moth of Blu’s shark. This intervention was very difficult because it was one of the first ones that we did and the result in comparison to the dimensions of the existing murals was quite disappointing. The tactility of graffiti and street art practices, as we will see in the following section, involves learning through training the body in a certain way of looking and acting in city space.

27 http://blublu.org/
3.3 First tactile encounter

I was with Teo in his studio ready to transform the first photograph into an image to be incorporated into the public space of Barcelona. He trimmed the A0 (118.9 x 84.1 cm) black and white printed photograph leaving only the contour of the photographed character. The name of the featured person on that first photograph was Jussif, a street worker from Ghana, who had lived in Barcelona for five years. Jussif arrived in the city without a resident permit and was what is called an ‘illegal immigrant’. This situation meant that for a few years Jussif had to work on the streets of Barcelona selling DVDs and collecting scrap metal. On one of those days, Jussif met Teo, who helped him to find a job and regularize his situation in Spain. Thus when Teo asked Jussif to be part of the project, Jussif gladly accepted the invitation to collaborate with him. Jussif was photographed featuring a street vendor running from the police, an everyday situation seen both in the centre and other touristic areas of Barcelona.

For the first intervention, Teo asked a friend who worked pasting wallpaper onto the walls of houses for some practical advices on pasting our first photograph. In theory, it seemed a very easy process: firstly we needed to prepare the glue. We followed the instructions to prepare it, mixing a powder with the right proportions of water while we shook it to avoid lumps forming until it became a sticky liquid. Then Teo rolled up the photograph that we had trimmed and we headed to the street with a plastic bucket full of glue and a brush. Everything was ready for our first expedition and we jumped on Teo’s motorbike towards ‘Carrer de la Verge’, a street located in the ‘Raval’ neighbourhood, which is part of the central district in ‘Ciutat Vela’. Teo had chosen this first location on the corner of a street where a second hand local market took place every Saturday. He thought that in this
location the photograph would be very visible. Later we would realise that a visible place was not the only aspect that we needed to take into account for our interventions. It was also important to look at the texture of the wall, how clean it was, the time of the day and the amount of graffiti and street artwork that were already on that wall.

It was one o’clock in the afternoon and the street was full of children and young people who had finished their classes in the nearby schools and public universities. This made the whole area very transitory. We eventually decided to act and began to paste the photograph onto the wall of the street corner. This street ends at ‘Carrer Vallonzella’, one of the arteries of the ‘Raval’, linked to ‘Ronda Sant Antoni’, which is part of the ‘Eixample’ district. Both districts, ‘Ciutat Vela’ and ‘Eixample’ were built in grid patterns but at different historical times and according to different spatial proportions: narrow and irregular in the old district of ‘Ciutat Vella’ in the ‘Raval’ and wide and squared in the modern ‘Eixample’. Most of the ‘Raval’ is a space in almost permanent shade where the sunlight is blocked by buildings (maximum six floors) that are very close to each other. It is a labyrinthine space where it is easy to get lost but also stay hidden from the authorities of the city. To hide and not be seen by police was precisely what Teo and I were trying to do while we were pasting the photograph onto the wall. This first time it took us longer than we expected and this increased the possibility of being caught and sanctioned. Firstly, the glue did not stick enough and moreover Teo applied too much of it. That made the photograph slip all over the wall, which did not have the right texture for good adherence either. Meanwhile I had set up my camera on the tripod in front of the wall and the action with the aim of filming not only Teo but also what was happening around him in the street. After twelve long minutes of struggle, we were very lucky that the photograph did not end up ripped into pieces. Finally we were able to paste it onto the wall and we left the area quickly after that.

From the moment at which we abandoned the image on the wall of the street corner it became part of public space and open to multiple and varied interpretations and reactions. It could be seen by the children going to the school or playing in the streets, the university students who went to print their notes and university works at the photocopier shop located on the same street, the people
who visited a nearby art gallery, and those who lived and worked around. What would they think? Was this street art? And how long would it last there?

A couple of days later I passed by the street corner and the photograph was still ‘up’. I took a couple of photographs and paid attention to the people who were passing by and looking at it. I observed how a group of local teenagers looked at the photograph and laughed when one of them said, pointing to the image of Jussif, ‘look a ‘nigger’. Soon after that day, the specialized council cleaning team removed it from the wall. This cleaning team is in charge of specific cleaning treatments focused on removing graffiti or other undesirable elements for the council, such as bubble gum and stickers that appear on walls, floors and other urban equipment surfaces. Since the civic regulation of 2006, the council has increased and reinforced its cleaning services in the neighbourhoods of the central district such as ‘El Raval’ and ‘El Gotico’. According to Xavier Olivella, the director of the council institution of Paistage Urba, “Urban landscape”, the central districts of the city have a population density level comparable to the highest levels of other cities in the world such as Calcutta in India. These streets, therefore, need special cleaning attention and are watered and cleaned every night by the council cleaning team. In relation to graffiti and street artworks, the information provided on the council’s website describes three different methods of removing graffiti. They paint over the graffiti on the walls applying the council’s palette of colours (normally creamy and grey colours) and they also use pressurized water and pressurized sand. I believe that they had used only the pressurized water to remove our paper photograph.

After that first intervention we did many more throughout the months in which I was in Barcelona and until the date of Teo’s exhibition in October 2014. Teo created four more characters: a female prostitute, an eastern European musician playing the accordion, a ‘Pakistani’ teenager selling cans of beer and a Nigerian worker collecting scrap with a supermarket trolley. They started to appear on the walls of different neighbourhoods. Some of then lasted just a few hours while others stayed for a long period of time becoming part of the walls and being intertwined and covered by other graffiti and street artworks. The different
interventions, more than thirty in total, also formed part of our learning process and experiential worlds.

3.4 Different ways of making and seeing

I am going to describe the experiences that we had on one of those days as a way to reflect on my personal exploration of the city through the production of street art images.

That day, we had arranged to meet at noon in a coffee bar next to Teo’s house in the ‘Exaímple’ district of Barcelona. This time we had the support of two of our friends who helped us with logistics and vigilance tasks. The ‘Raval’, ‘El Borne’ and ‘Poble Sec’, all neighbourhoods in the central district of the city were our targets. This was our third time, but we still had a lot to learn and understand about how things worked in the streets. We had a total of four printed photographs to paste but we had not decided about any particular places in advance.

The first spot where we decided to intervene was in a square of the ‘Raval’ called ‘Placa de Terenci Moix’, an open space formed by a basketball pitch, a bar terrace at one of the corners, a few small benches, a new building with a brown glass façade on one side and a couple of churches behind us. This square was renewed in 2010 as part of the ‘Plan Central de Raval’, the most ambitious urban plan in the central district of the city developed during the last decade. It was a sunny day and the wall that was once full of graffiti and posters was this time completely clean and grey. Teo was surprised and at the same time intimidated by the spotless appearance of the wall. The terrace located in one of the corners of the square was full of people enjoying the sun, talking and having their midday aperitif. The action began and Teo energetically approached the wall and began applying the glue onto it with the brush. I was recording from one side and our friends were at the two entrances to the square. The walls of the square amplified the sound of the people laughing and talking on the terrace and hearing how loud they were made me nervous. In less than four minutes everything was finished and we walked away leaving the image behind. Straightaway after this first intervention, we went to our next possible spot.
This was another square, a two-minute walk from the first one, called ‘Placa del Angels’. The square is located on the north side of the ‘Raval’ and was built as an extension of the impressive glass and white building designed by Richard Meier in 1995 for the MACBA, the Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona. The space created by the museum’s modern building and the square around it was at the time a breakthrough for the general appearance and architectural features of the area, which is based mainly on narrow streets and more classical architecture. The square is a very transitory space for local residents and tourists and a favourite spot and meeting point for skating in the city. On one of the square’s walls next to the white building of the museum, there is a large ceramic mosaic called ‘Barcelona’, which was created by the recognized Spanish Basque sculptor Eduardo Chillida. On the large wall next to the mosaic we decided to paste another of the photographs. This was the same polished grey concrete wall that was used by the MACBA museum to reproduce its traced copy of the mural that Haring painted in another square of this same neighbourhood in 1989, as I explained in chapter 2. The sounds of skate wheels rolling and skateboards against the floor of the square dominated the ‘soundscape’ around me. I was next to a terrace bar with my camera on the tripod, in front of the wall where Teo struggled to paste the photograph. At one point one of our friends warned Teo that a security guard from the museum was at the door of the building looking towards us and we quickly packed everything up and started to walk away.
A few hours later, in the afternoon, we walked back to both squares to check if the photographs were still on the walls but they were not there. Maybe open and transited spaces in the central district like these squares were not very suitable places to paste our photographs; maybe this was because of the texture of the surfaces or the amount of glue needed or even both these factors and others. I wondered, however, if it really mattered, as we had filmed and taken photographs of the whole process. What did we want to achieve by pasting Teo’s photographs on public space walls? Did we want only the footage of the intervention or were we following something else? Now, I can say that I personally enjoyed the fact that the photographs survived as part of the public space in Barcelona. The fact of seeing the photographs on the walls made me remember our actions and wonder about why and how those images had survived in the city. This made me look at images, as W.J.T Mitchell (2005) argues, in terms of their desires as personified objects.

Our images on the walls of the city represented multiple dimensions of vitality, linked to the people who were represented on them and connected with image making, collaborations and personal projects. I think that once we left the photographs pasted onto the walls, they immediately started to be fused with other images in the city. They could be removed or cleaned up by the council or transformed or covered by other artists. In each of those possible cases, the photographs communicated something to other people. However, we also need to keep in mind that these photographs did not communicate anything for many of the inhabitants, who passed by without paying attention to them. In relation to graffiti and street art images, this ‘double consciousness’ about images and its
relation to the graffiti and street images (Mitchell 2005), was undetermined and unpredictable within the messy networks of the city.

The existence of graffiti and street art is embedded in complex social relations. I define it as complex due to the multiple contexts, actors and concrete and abstract relations (Strathern 1995: 30) that shape graffiti. Here we can identify the involvement of various social actors such as graffiti and street artists, art associations and collectives, city institutions and the general public. We can find contradictions in their discourses and in addition we can see processes of transformations through adaptation and alternative ways of making graffiti and street art in the city space. To understand the graffiti of Barcelona, I have engaged in a multi-sited ethnography in connection with different neighbourhoods, art centres, graffiti associations, artists, social collectives and galleries in the city. Hence, I tried to be part of the production of graffiti and street artworks rather than only observing them. This allowed me to be in between the non-existence and existence of the works and experience different ways of seeing and making graffiti and street art.

All of the interventions of the ‘Making the street’ project were recorded through videos and photographs. Photography and video were useful tools for reflecting on the transformations of these images, not only as part of different public space surfaces but also as other kinds of images. In the final stage of the project, I helped Teo to prepare his exhibition and together we edited two videos. One of them was used as part of the promotion of the exhibition. It was uploaded on ‘vimeo’ and ‘You-Tube’ and later posted on ‘facebook’ and other social media networks. The second video, as I said before, was part of Teo’s exhibition in the gallery and was played on a plasma screen alongside the framed photographs of the characters that we had pasted onto the street walls. It could be argued that the project was a starting point for Teo as a street artist. It helped him as a form of self-promotion and as a new way of working with his photography. For me it implies a way of reflecting on how graffiti and street artworks are not static images; as Jarman (1998) states about the murals in Ireland, they can be reproduced, manipulated
and transformed and therefore they need to be approached taking into account both their physical and social environments.

I proposed the third place where we might paste another of the photographs. It was on the façade of an old abandoned business building in a street called ‘Carrer de la Cera’. This street is also part of the ‘Raval’ neighbourhood but is very close to the ‘San Antoni’ and ‘Poble Sec’ neighbourhoods, which belong to the ‘Eixample’ and the ‘Sants-Montjuïc’ districts. I knew the street through two of the participants in my research, the multidisciplinary street artist Jorge Rodríguez Gerada and his neighbour Maria. She had been painted on a wall of the ‘Raval’ by Jorge, as part of his Identidades, “Identities”, street art project, and both lived in the same building in ‘Carrer de la Cera’. Maria, who was 78 years old and had lived for most of her life in this street, described it to me in the following terms.

‘Not too long ago, the environment in this street was very warm and friendly between the neighbours and with the owners of the local business too. ‘La Cera’ street was famous because there were many gypsies; they were the ‘gypsies’ and we were the payos, “non gypsies”, but there was never a row between ‘gypsies’ and ‘payos’; never…. Now you cannot see gypsies anymore, there are just foreigners and people in transit…’

Maria did not feel safe anymore in this neighbourhood after she had been robbed twice in her own street. Now most of the businesses in this street are mobile phone shops and convenience stores managed by immigrants from Pakistan, India and other countries. Previously, according to Maria, there were all kinds of businesses in the ‘Cera’ street and everybody knew each other. Maria identified herself with the street of another time through her memories. The same street had become part of my research and my memories through my relationship and conversations with Jorge and Maria. Now it was also part of my personal journey across different spaces in the city through my collaboration with Teo.

It was one in the afternoon and the ‘Cera’ street was busy with people shopping and going into the restaurants and bars to eat lunch. I pointed out an abandoned old building and Teo checked the possibilities for pasting one of the photographs. It was full of graffiti, stencils and posters and there was not much space for us. So we decided to move on and look for another spot.
Our journey across the city space searching for possible spots was like a path composed by multiple possibilities. The visual material that we recorded allowed us to reflect on the interactions that we had and learn for the future. Following our journey across the city on the same day that I am describing, we moved from ‘Carrer de la Cera’ in the ‘Raval’ towards the ‘Paralel Avenue’ in the ‘Poble Sec’ neighbourhood to paste one of the photographs in ‘Las tres chimeneas’ square. In this square there are three liberated graffiti walls with great symbolic value for the community of graffiti and street artists. As I will explain in chapter 6, in recent years these walls have been the object of collaborations and conflicts between the council, street art associations and graffiti artists. Today it is necessary to apply for an official permit on a web managed by ‘Murs Lliures’, a street art association that collaborates with the council of Barcelona, to have the right to intervene on these walls. We did not have such a permit and there were policemen in the square, so we decided to go back to the narrow streets of the ‘Raval’ and ‘El Borne’. On our way back we found a wall, which was part of an empty building site. Although the council had provisionally equipped the empty space with some gym machines, some traces of the demolished houses were still visible on the different colours and surfaces of two standing walls.

Teo decided to paste one of the photographs onto one of these walls. I began to film him from the square next to the empty site called ‘Jean Genet’ with the aim of getting a wide shot of the action in connection to the space. The square is bordered by the ‘Drassanes Avenue’, which at that time of the day is passed by many cars and people. This time Teo was standing on top of a plastic box that he had found in the street to paste the photograph as high as possible on that big wall. Two minutes into the action, I heard a whistle coming from the avenue directly behind us. It was one of our friends warning us about a police van that was passing by the avenue. I turned to look towards the avenue and I saw three national policemen coming out of a van and running towards us. I closed my tripod straightaway but they ran towards Teo, shouting at him. Teo stayed calm and they searched and identified him and asked him a few questions. They did not pay attention to my presence and I put the camera into my bag and walked away from them. At that moment I thought that if they checked the footage of my camera they could have seen the rest
of the recorded interventions and that would have made things even worse. After ten minutes of uncertainty, Teo called me on my mobile phone and I went back to the same place to meet him. The police had taken the photograph off the wall but they had forgiven him a penalty of 200 euros.

All of the interventions that I have described here were made in the central district of the city. This area is one of the most popular with tourists and is more densely populated than any other in the city. And it has a greater police presence as well. However, it is also one of the favourite areas for the graffiti artists and is where they want their works to be seen. The central district was the epicentre of the local graffiti movement in the 1990s and it is still considered a symbolic space charged with memories and walls to paint. They speak with nostalgia when they talk about the past and how they lost their presence and strength in the city centre. After our first few experiences in the neighbourhoods of the central district and the problem that we had with the police, we decided to paste our photographs in other areas of the city such as ‘El Carmel’, ’l’Eixample’ and ‘Poble Nou’.

Throughout this process, we learnt that our interventions had to be planned in advance taking into account aspects such as the time of the day and the space we were targeting. The rest of the circumstances and possible risks were beyond our control. We also learnt that pasting photographs onto walls was a tactile experience, based not only on the practical side of how to stick the paper onto the walls but also on the way in which we moved and acted in the city space without a permit, and therefore with a certain element of risk. There were practical aspects that we also learnt throughout this process such as applying the glue directly onto the photograph and only a small amount onto the wall. Eventually, we started to identify certain features of the space where the photographs lasted longer and where it was safer to intervene. Most of these locations ended up being in the central district alongside other graffiti and street artworks, on the metal doors of abandoned buildings, and on walls that seemed to have been forgotten or
appropriated by graffiti artists that had become ‘small hidden islands of freedom’
and surrounded by the general order.

In terms of our collaboration, we had multiple debates throughout the whole
process about different ways of filming, the framing of the images, the distance
from the action or the editing of the final videos. Eventually our collaborative
relations also shaped the images that we produced during the project. Thus these
images can be seen, using MacDougall's (2006) term, as ‘corporeal images’ created
not only by the interplay of different ways of looking and image making but also
imprinted by the movements and interactions of our bodies in the streets. After our
third time in the streets pasting photographs, I adopted a different way of filming
the interventions without a tripod. This allowed me to invest less time, be more
spontaneous and have more freedom of movement to follow the action. As many of
the street artists explained to me, the graffiti and street artworks created today in
the central district of Barcelona are very different to the big murals painted in the
1990s. The time invested, the materials used and the aesthetics of the street
artworks in public space have changed. However, this has opened up other
possibilities shaped by other materials and ways of interacting with public space.
Like in the ‘Making the street’ project and in my own research, the graffiti and
street art in Barcelona navigates between planned and spontaneous actions.

28I refer to Arendt's words 'small hidden island of freedom' (Arendt 1968:6) as spaces taken by oppositional
groups to claim their rights against the dominant orders.
It was getting dark when we decided to cross the ‘Ramblas’ and walk into the narrow streets of the ‘Borne’ neighbourhood. This neighbourhood is the old gothic city, an area with an irregular layout of narrow streets where old buildings are mixed with shops, bars and residency houses. After a few minutes of walking I was already lost in the labyrinth system of streets and I just followed Teo. We stopped at the narrow street of ‘Carrer d’en Boquer’, a kind of corridor formed by empty building sites on one side and buildings with wooden and metallic doors on the other. The corridor was completely empty. Teo took out the brush and started to apply glue to a surface that seemed to be an old door that had been blocked by a wall. In less than three minutes everything had finished. The next day I made the same journey to check if the photograph was still on the wall. It took me ages to find it and just I had decided to give up and was trying to find the way back to my house, I saw where it was.

3.5 Ephemeral dynamics

Today, in addition to what the local council calls illegal graffiti, we also find graffiti and street art works commissioned or formally authorized by institutions in the
public space of Barcelona. In some of those cases, the graffiti and street artworks have become permanent works alongside other public artworks in the city. This shows that graffiti has also gone through different processes of transformation, which have changed its social dynamics and how it is practised, perceived and consumed.

La Cara de Badalona, “The Face of Badalona”, created by the multi-disciplinary artist Jorge Rodriguez Gerada is an example of street art commissioned as public street artwork by the council, in this case by the Ayuntamiento de Badalona, “Council of Badalona”, a city on the periphery of Barcelona. The creation of ‘The Face of Badelona’ was part of the art project Indetitat (s) “Identities” in 2009, which focused on the creation of awareness and reflexivity about the city-space and its diverse population through street art. This street artwork was painted with charcoal over a white background on a wall 400 meters square. It represented a face made out of the fusion of 34 photographic portraits of different people of the city. The application of a special product over the mural made it a permanent image and a symbol of the ethnic diversity in the city. Arguably the specific features of this mural changed the street art nature of Gerada’s murals, which I will describe in more detail in chapter five. Here, the ephemeral nature of Jorge’s ‘Identity’ series and its transformation with the passage of time was transformed into a permanent image of the city as public art.

In this sense, the ephemeral nature of graffiti has not only material implications but also tells us about the importance of the act of painting. Many authors who have studied graffiti pay attention to its ephemeral nature. The anthropologist Susan Phillips (1999) analyses the ephemeral features of graffiti from different perspectives. She looks at the instability of graffiti as a form and how it is exposed to the actions of other people; moreover she analyses how graffiti is part of the particular social and historical context in which it is created. The concept of ephemerality, Phillips (1999) states: ‘... points not just to the circumstances that surround a graffito’s production but to the broader context of its ‘being and becoming’ in the first place’ (1999:33). To support her statement, Phillips (1999) makes reference to the analysis of the ephemeral quality of graffiti developed by the art historian Ellen Handler Spitz (1991), who compares the ephemerality of
graffiti with adolescence and its unstable and temporary circumstances. This approach can be interpreted in two ways: on one hand we can emphasize the material characteristics of graffiti as an ephemeral object across space and time; and on the other it can let us think about the creation of graffiti as part of a process shaped not only by space and time but also by individual and collective experiences, memories and motivations. Through the latter interpretation, graffiti works are not only approached as isolated material elements that we have to document and categorize. In contrast, they are part of individual artists careers, cities and societies, which change with them and are part of their ephemeral reality. Since the *Haciendo la Calle* project, Teo has continued pasting more of his photographs in Barcelona and other cities such as Bristol. In 2015, he developed a proposal alongside a bio-construction collective called T-Xtema29 and they applied to the council for a permit. This permit will allow Teo to paste some of his photographs on a larger scale and on more permanent basis on the public space walls that surround the space where the bio-construction collective is developing one of its projects.

In the next chapter I will address the permanent and ephemeral nature of graffiti in Barcelona, looking at the transformation process of a mural painted on the squatted building of ‘La Carbonería’.

29 https://goteo.org/project/biobui-l-t-txema?lang=en
Chapter 4: ‘La Carbonería’: An alternative transformation of public space

4.1. Introduction

The ‘chaflán’ was one of the key architectural features proposed by Ildefonso Cerdá in his ‘Eixample’ (meaning, literally, extension) urban plan approved in 1860. One of the aims of this architectural strategy was to reduce the angle of the corners of the streets and thereby create more public space to facilitate the mobility and circulation of bodies in the new modern city of Barcelona. In this chapter I am going to describe the creation of a graffiti mural on the city’s ‘chaflán’ so as to explore further the meanings of making public space in relation to official strategies in the city.

According to the local law and most of the graffiti and street artists that I met and interviewed, the practice of graffiti and street art in the public spaces of Barcelona is illegal if it is done without a permit from the council. Nevertheless, one only needed to walk around the city centre in neighbourhoods such as ‘El Raval’ or ‘El Gótico’ to find plenty of new and old graffiti and street artworks. Throughout my fieldwork, I observed that there were particular places and situations where graffiti and street artworks had not been erased and the authorities did not intervene. To analyse how this was the case –in spite of contravening local civic ordinance- I am going to use the example of a collective mural painted by local graffiti artists in the squatted building of ‘La Carbonería’. I collaborated in this mural and experienced how the images of the mural were not only painted but also discussed and debated
in assemblies and commented on by the inhabitants of the neighbourhood and the council’s representatives.

My participation in this mural arose from my collaboration with ‘Grafforum’, a section of a TV hip-hop programme focused on graffiti. As I describe later in the last chapter of this thesis, I participated as a volunteer in ‘La Tele Pum Clap’, a hip-hop programme that was part of an alternative local TV channel broadcast on the local TDT, called ‘La Tele’. It allowed me to get into contact with members of the local graffiti and street-art scene and record and edit videos about their work. One of those encounters was with the squatter collective of ‘La Carbonerí’, which had its headquarters in a squatted building in the centre of the city. They got in contact with ‘Grafforum’ for the ‘covering’ (filming and dissemination) of the painting process of a new mural on the façade of their building. I experienced how this process was articulated in the decisions, actions and reactions of the people who participated directly and indirectly in the painting of the mural. I ended up filming the painting of the mural for more than three weeks and as a collaborator and researcher I became part of the mural too.

Moving around the wide and transited public space that surrounded the building, I realized how the actions of a collective of squatters and street artists had transformed the sensory order of public space in the city. Drawing on Ranciére’s (2004) work and his idea of the ‘distribution of the sensible’, I argue that public space is shaped by a dominant sensory order that conditions its transformation and the way in which people can participate in it. This distribution determines what can be said, done and made in the public space, establishing particular ‘aesthetics’. The disruption of this ‘aesthetics’ is, according to Ranciére, (2004) at the core of politics and a form of experience (2004:13). In referring to the aesthetics, I am using Ranciére’s (2004) conception of this term as follows: ‘aesthetic encloses not only perceptive qualities but also practices and performances, production of places and fostering of social and political relations’ (2004:10).

Thus in talking about graffiti in terms of aesthetics, I am making reference not only to its static material features but also to the active ways of being and doing material work in the public space of the city. This allowed me to produce and appreciate
being part of what I call the ‘graffiti texture’ of the city and to address a question about why the people from ‘La Carbonería’ were able to create their mural in the public space without any authorization? They were painting the mural for almost three weeks during the daytime, closing off half of the sidewalk and hanging from ropes at great heights and the police never intervened to stop them or issue them with an appropriate penalty. The significance of these actions is open to multiple interpretations. Throughout the following section I am going to describe how the mural created on the surface of the squatted building of ‘La Carbonería’ navigated between different distributions of the sensible in the public space of Barcelona.

4.2 The Building

The mural was painted on the surface of ‘La Carbonería’, which as I have already said, was a building occupied by squatters for more than five years. The building formed the chaflàn, “chamfer”, between the ‘Carrer Comtes d’Urgel’ and ‘Floridablanca’ and was located in the central district of ‘Ciutat Vella’. It was a building of five floors situated on one of the sides of a square formed by the confluence of four very busy streets. Its location made the building and therefore the mural highly visible to many people as it could be seen from diverse angles. This architectural feature gave the squatted building a certain privileged position in this space: a position that dampened noise and allowed more natural light onto the whole building, as sunlight shone onto its back patio and terraces in the morning and its front balconies in the afternoon.
This architectural position as well as its geographical location, in the centre of the city, made the building a good communication tool for social and political movements. In the building, the squatter collective organized vegan dinners to support political prisoners\textsuperscript{30}, informative talks concerning issues such as ecological issues and meetings and gatherings with other collectives. In sum, many projects discussed in this centre were made viable thanks to its location and this made it a reference point for the anti-capitalist movement in the city. Thus the squatted building was not simply a house where the occupants did not pay rent; it also functioned as an interface of multiple social and political communications, and the mural as I will try to describe throughout this chapter was one of these interfaces. The surface of the building was not simply formed by walls, balconies and windows but it enclosed a certain ‘distribution of the sensible’.

There were eight flats in the building, with an average of fifteen to twenty people living in ‘La Carbonería’ at any time. One of the floors was a communal area, where they had a kitchen, a dinner room with long tables, a living room and a gym. Everyday the occupants of the building took it in turns to cook for the whole house and the gym was used to provide free yoga, dance and martial arts classes. On the ground floor they had three independent spaces with a free shop and a library where people could donate or get free clothes. In addition, they also hosted a public vegan dinner every Thursday as well as occasional music concerts and poetry readings. All of these workshops and activities were open to the San Antoni neighbourhood and its inhabitants.

As a collective action, the painting of the mural in 2010 and its renewal in 2013 was a way to interact with, and bring their project ideals closer to, the people of the city. But what did they want to transmit through the murals and how did different people understand the content of the murals on the building? To try to answer this question, the murals are approached in terms of the ‘graffiti texture’ that I am proposing in this research. The mural represented the collectivity of ‘La Carbonería’ as a social movement linked to a building while its ‘texture’ was embodied through different forms of making graffiti, seeing the city and living

\textsuperscript{30}They supported people such Mexican eco-anarchists and animal rights and vegan activist prisoners in Spain and other countries like Holland.
within it. To understand how this graffiti texture is a tactile way of fostering social relations, we need to explore the physical properties of this building. For a while the qualities of its surface and the small size of its windows and flats within made the building habitable and affordable for working class people, those same material properties were seen by the graffiti artists as sources of inspiration for political claims. Can we use the graffiti and street artworks to reflect on the dynamism of life in the city across spaces and times?

4.3 The assembly: ways of seeing and socialising

It was in one of their weekly assemblies at the end of February that they began to discuss the creation of a new mural. There were two main reasons behind this initiative. The most important was linked to the eviction notice that they had received from the lawyers of Barclays Bank, the official owners of the building. The second reason was based on a feeling that some of the members of the collective had about the old mural: they thought that it had become another of Barcelona's tourist attractions at which people stopped to take photographs. Eventually, the painting of the new mural became the symbol of their campaign, No Encadenado Nuestro Vuelo, “Let us fly without chains”, to protest against their eviction and to find social support. Within this context, the participants in the assembly began to discuss the content of the new mural. They were aware of the potential of the new mural to make their claims visible and to give voice to their cause. In contrast, some of them also felt some emotional attachment to the old mural and proposed alternatives that did not require its erasure. But these sentiments came too late and
they thought that the painting of a new mural on their façade would be their best shot at attracting attention and creating awareness as well as giving themselves more support and time to counter Barclays’ actions.

The CSO (Centro Social Ocupado), “Squatted social centre”, assembly was constituted when they moved into the building in November of 2008. Before it was squatted the building was bought by a real estate construction company, which evicted the old tenants. The construction’s company plan was to demolish the old building and build new apartments. But the financial crisis, as I will explain later in this chapter, meant that this never happened as it eventually caused the bankruptcy of the company. Since the occupation, the CSO had always tried to offer the space for collaborations with other associations of the neighbourhood such as La asamblea de jóvenes de San Antoni, “The Youth Assembly of San Antoni”, and La asociacion de vecinos y vecinas de San Antoni, “The neighbours association of San Antoni”. In addition, they had become integrated into the neighbourhood through their involvement and collaboration in different local initiatives and annual celebrations such as the Las Fiestas del Barrio, “local neighbourhood festivities”.

Although the regular assistants at the assembly were members of the ‘La Carbonería’ collective (CSO), on this occasion there were also people from other collectives who had decided to participate in the painting of the new mural. The CSO collective was formed by a diverse group of people of different ages, genders, nationalities and with various occupations. Among them, there were artists with experience in fields such as fine arts, mural painting and graffiti. When they squatted in the house in 2008, it was these artists who immediately saw the possibilities that the building’s surface had for testing and putting into practice their artistic skills. Deru³¹, one of these artists, explained this to me in the following way: ‘… only a few times you have the chance to paint a wall of such dimension in the centre of a big city. And we wanted to try and see how it would be, the experience and the result. Finally it was very well accepted and the police did not stop us: we skipped like eighty thousand civic and security ordinances of the council but we did not have any problem and we achieved our goal…’.

³¹ http://www.ekosystem.org/tag_big/deru
The debate in the assembly was focused on what message they wanted to communicate through the renewal of that first mural and how they would organize and develop their actions to achieve this communication. The semiotic content of graffiti, as we have appreciated throughout this thesis, is part of a complex, dynamic and non-linear process where the meanings of the environment are actively coproduced by the people who create and experience it (Da Silva, Teixera & McCafferty 2011: 5). For some of the collective's members, the mural needed to express their disappointment towards the urban speculation in the city and the local council regulations of public space. There was a sector of the assembly that had a more radical and aggressive posture and proposed to paint a big rose in flames, making reference to the Rosa de Fuego, “Rose of Fire”. This was the symbolic name that the city received at the beginning of the 20th century due to the fame of its social uprisings and resistance mobilizations against the dominant economic and state powers. Another sector of the group formed by the graffiti and street artists made a case for a more conciliatory attitude, based on collective and creative action with other artists.

The postures of both of these sectors can be seen as representing the diversity of views within the local graffiti scene. On the one hand, there are artists who see the practice of graffiti as something radical and opposed to the establishment. On the other, there are artists who see their work in the streets as a mode of interaction with the general public or as medium for self-promotion. The tensions between these artists and the different sectors of the assembly are about ‘antagonistic aesthetics’, where according to Rancière (2004) the politics of disruption emerges and allows individuals to participate in the ‘public sphere’ (2004: 12). In this sense, the process of the mural creation displays how politics can take place in multiple contexts, not only in the neutral and rational context of the public sphere where according to Habermas’ ideal model, the rational political discourse could emerge.

In chapter 6, I will explore these different contexts further, by describing the nature and networks of relations within Barcelona's graffiti scene and so address these tensions between the different views about graffiti in the city. In ‘La Carbonería’, although the council accepted the mural -and by this I mean simply that the police did not intervene to stop it- there was a tension and crucial differences between the
understanding and making of graffiti in public space. As this chapter shows, one of the tensions is related to how the space, the times of making, and the content of the mural were established by the collective and followed by the council, not the other way around. So it was, as Deru explained to me, ‘...possible because different artists who were part of a collective got together in this same space and we knew how to act and get some support from the neighbours...’. The success of the action, therefore, was conditioned by a balance and productive tension between their capacity to communicate with the public and their collective organization and intervention in public space.

At the start of the process, Fran, one of the graffiti artists in the assembly, painted a general sketch of the new mural. It was open to the input of other graffiti and street artists who wanted to collaborate in the project. Thus, at the outset, the idea of the graffiti artists was focused not only on ‘La Carboneria’ and its claims but also on the people of the neighbourhood and themselves as actors of a collaborative art project. The previous mural had ended up becoming a symbol for the collective members themselves and for most of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, who accepted and recognized it as part of their urban landscape. For the members of the CSO assembly that first mural of big black and white roots growing out of a tree house symbolized their birth as a collective, which was materialized when they arrived and squatted in this neighbourhood building. The roots, as Fran said to me, symbolized their energy and how this was linked to that space and to the city. The new mural implied the erasure of the old mural and their replacement with a new symbol of the collective reality that they had now been living for four years.

The first time I saw the old mural it was a great surprise to me. It was in 2010 and I was walking around the area when suddenly there it was, an alien figure in front of me on one of the buildings in the city space. The massive scale of the mural and the contrast that it made with the rest of the buildings was what really hit me. This first shock of the encounter and my corporeal interaction with the mural did not fit at all with the meaning of the symbolic content that the mural had for the members of ‘La Carbonería’ collective. As W.J.T. Mitchell (2002) argues about images, the image of

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32 http://basuravisual.blogspot.co.uk/
the mural in the public space mediated between ways of seeing and ways of socialising in the city. It takes us to look at the mural in terms of the everyday seeing in the city or what Mitchell (2002) defines as ‘vernacular visuality’. In this sense, the mural acted as an interface between individuals who shared the same space and the different visual conceptions about the construction of it.

Neil Jarman (1998) argues in his study about the political murals in the city of Belfast that their significance is generated through a semiotic dynamic in which the images take meanings from the location and at the same time the location takes meanings from the images (Jarman 1998:5). Making reference to the mural in ‘La Carbonería’ and placing it within the particular context of Barcelona and the creation of graffiti and street art in the public space of the city, I think that there is a level missing in Jarman’s argument, linked in this case to the actual act of making those images. As I have mentioned before, graffiti and street art created in the public space of Barcelona without a permit is prosecuted and banned. The painting of this mural not only transgressed the council’s civic ordinances but also created an arena within which to debate and discuss them.

Although in the assembly there was more than one proposal for the new project, eventually they agreed that the new mural should represent the conflictive relationship between different conceptions of the city. These different conceptions included ideas about collectivism, linked to the collective members themselves and the self-managed and collaborative projects developed in the squatted building. Then there was the local council and the economic powers in the city, which tried to establish a kind of absolute control over the public spaces and their inhabitants. The generalized and abstract idea of representing these different conceptions together began to take form little by little through the collective and individual performances of the members of the house and the artists who collaborated and participated in the mural. It was a complex process that sometimes flowed and sometimes was blocked by logistical and participation problems. These problems included dealing with artists and collaborators, some of whom were more involved than others, the lack of painting materials and other organizational issues.
During the first stage of the mural, it was possible to see how the communicative aspect of the mural was differentiated. There was a focus on the content of the mural, which as I mentioned above, was addressed in the assembly debates. But the mural was also conceived and used as a symbolic object that was part of a wider context than the one limited to the physical boundaries of its image.

The new images did not begin to take form until a few days after they started to paint. During this time there were all kinds of speculations among the people passing by. It could be said that the semiotic dynamic of the mural images began in people's heads as they imagined into being what they could not see. They imagined themselves into the actions of the artists and the surface of the wall. This imagination formed part of a broader and dissensual game of the visible and the invisible in a public space that both approved and disapproved of the mural’s ‘distribution of the sensible’, (Rancière in Plot 2014:94). Although most of the people with whom I spoke supported the creation of the mural, there were also people who disapproved of the creation of images without an official permit on the surface of a public wall. Thus the creation of the mural staged the overlapping of different forms of ‘politics’ in public space. The following statements are just a few examples that I heard, either from passers-by or in conversations that I was part of, during the time that I spent filming the mural. They will allow us to think about the mural in terms of ‘relational’ art and to look at ‘relationships between people over and above institutionalized relational forms’ (Bourriaud 1998 in Lind 2009:58). However, in these statements we also find the expression of antagonistic
aesthetics between the public, the council and the artists. It raises the question of how we can talk about ‘relational art’ when there are relationships shaped not only by a collaborative or collective but also by antagonistic aesthetics? And did the different relations around the mural form part of it as well?

A couple of elderly women who were coming back from doing their daily shopping in the neighbourhood stopped next to me and my camera and began to talk, making reference to the squatted building and the mural: ‘They have no right to break into an empty building and claim their rights over its possession and use….’ This kind of statement was generally linked to debates about housing issues in the city. As a reply to this in a conversation after lunch in ‘La Carbonería’, a member of the collective argued that: ‘…it was not right to buy a building in the centre of a city and evict its tenants and afterwards leave it empty and speculate with its price …’. In the same conversation with the elderly women, one of them pointed with her hand to one of the windows of the building and told me ‘…there it was where my cousin used to live and they evicted her for dos reales “a small amount of old Spanish coins”’.

In relation to the debate about the use of public space, a middle aged woman who was walking next to the building said in a loud voice to the people who were painting the lower side of the mural: ‘…you know it is illegal to paint without permits in the street, this is banned …’ In this situation, some of the artists would reply: ‘Nobody asked me if I wanted to see advertisement billboards as part of the public space…’. The most common statement that I heard from the local graffiti artists was: ‘we want to have a colourful city and not a grey one controlled by multinational companies and taken over by their images and commercial aims…’.

With regard to the squatter movement the same couple of elderly women who I mentioned above told me: ‘It is not right to have everything for free (making reference to the squatters) when we are paying light, water and taxes…’ The people from ‘La Carbonería’ used to argue that the working conditions in the city were not right either and that most of the young people could not afford to pay the high housing rents in Barcelona. At some point in my conversation with the elderly women, one of them angrily claimed: ‘It is not right if everyone does what whatever they want without any respect for the law and the authorities. Where are the police
today?’ In contrast, the people from ‘La Carbonería’ and other similar collectives in the city critiqued how the council criminalized all the alternative practices in the public space such as graffiti and street art. Many times I heard the comment: ‘...the street belongs to everyone, not only to the tourist...’. Finally, while I was talking with the two women, a man joined in and said: ‘The people who live in ‘La Carbonería’ just think of themselves and their own benefits...’, and one of the women concluded, ‘Yes he is right and they are very noisy and have no respect for the old people...’.

As we have seen the mural at ‘La Carbonería’ fostered not only collaborative and collective relationships but also antagonistic and contradictory ones. Thus the ‘distribution of the sensible’ around the mural represents something more than a shared sensible world. It encloses, as Ranciére (2004) defined in his concept, ‘... a polemical distribution of modes of being and occupations’ (2004: 42).

4.4 The texture of corporeal vision: painting of the mural

Looking at the images of the new mural, there were two separate parts. On the lower side of the building, there was a city skyline made up of grey buildings in the form of padlocks. These buildings were attached with a chain that according to Fran, one of the artists, metaphorically represented the economic and state power and its control. On the other part above the city skyline, the chain was broken by air balloons, which had escaped from the city. But, as we have seen in the description of the process, the mural was not only about what the images represented and where they were made; it was also about how they were made. This brings us to
forms of corporeal vision and the textural qualities of the surfaces of these walls, which are ways of understanding sensory relations in the city space.

Everything began with a small drawing made by one of the graffiti artists. He had come back from the Canary islands where he was living in order to support and help the collective against the ejection. Then the members of the collective started to interact with the surface of the house and the new mural started to take form. I found this period of transformation between the old and the new mural very intriguing and I gained a particular insight through my role as cameraman filming the whole process. In this way I could directly participate in the making process.

The strategy that they used to paint the mural, as Deru explained to me, was as follows: ‘… we did it in a clever way, thinking and planning everything very well to reduce the possibilities of police intervention to stop the painting of the mural. Thus in our two murals interventions on the building, we began using harnesses and ropes and hanging on the wall. It allowed us get into the house through any of the windows if the police tried to stop or identify us…’. This interaction between the artists and the surface of the wall allows us to think in terms of sensory relations within and around the painting of the mural. Here we can recognize how the graffiti texture of the mural was formed not only by the material images but also by a particular way of making them and being at the wall. For the artists, being attached to the wall involved close contact with it, to the degree that they were literally part of the mural and they were able to even enter into it, in order to ‘escape’. Using David MacDougall’s (2006) concept of ‘corporeal vision’, it can be said that the mural was formed by ‘corporeal images’, which carry the imprint not only of the bodies who make them, but also of the ways in which these images are seen by other bodies who interact with them. Therefore the texture of the mural is an abstract form, which contains not only images but also people and social relations that are shaped by ways of seeing and ways of making images.

These actions with the ropes also turned the street into a situation akin to a circus performance, where the graffiti and street artists were in the air hanging from ropes, and a guessing game went on at street level where people guessed what it was that they were painting. At one level this situation was about the artists
reclaiming public space through transgressing the boundary practices of bodies and surfaces and the horizontal, walking forms of mobility. At another level of interpretation these actions can be understood as extending the spectacular nature of the modern city and its visually-determined image (Debord 1983, Lefebvre 1991 in Chang 2013:218). Drawing on Vanessa Chang’s (2013) argument regarding the work of the Italian street artist Blu, where she says that ‘...Blu’s work reminds us that urban inscription is at once an act and an aesthetic, and that it is necessary to engage our urban environments in all the ways available to us’ (2013:232), it could be argued that the participants in ‘La Carbonería’s mural used the vertical, hanging spectacle as an aesthetic tool to inscribe and reimage the city (2013: 217). Thus their radical position in the public space, suspended in the air and attached to the ropes, posited an ethereal departure point for the mural. It highlighted the mutable nature of the city and showed different possibilities for multi-dimensional experiences of moving and interacting with its surfaces. The properties of the building’s surface and therefore its texture emerges as the anthropologist Tim Ingold (2007) argues about the properties of artistic Neolithic stones: ‘... through the stone’s involvement in its total surroundings’ and he concludes, ‘the properties of materials, in short, are not attributes but histories’ (2007:14).

Thus the painting of the mural was a process that also drew the attention of the general public, as the surfaces of the urban landscape were actively changing in front of them.

This active attention from the public took different forms:
There were verbal exchanges that involved the artists breaking off from the actions of making and re-configuring their working space with the surface of the wall to talk with the passers-by. These verbal interactions took place on the sidewalk next to the building and between the artists who were painting the lowest side of the mural and some of the pedestrians who passed by during most of the day.
Another form of interpretation was photography, which was a form of ‘capture’; that transferred the surface material textures of the wall into digital textures (pixels) and into virtual (digital) space of the photograph. As I mentioned in chapter two, photography has been used as a medium not only to document and study graffiti from an art history perspective (Stewart 2009), but also to explore it
as part of the social and political contexts of the city, closer to the visual studies frame of interpretation (Chalfant and Cooper 1984). The way in which photography was used to capture the mural by passers by can be approached from different perspectives. From one perspective, the old mural, as some of the squatters stated had become part of what John Urry defines as ‘the tourist gaze’. This means that the mural was one of the signs that the tourists collected through photography as part of the touristic image of the city. Most members of the public who captured photographs of the mural used their smartphones. It is possible therefore that the photographs of the mural were incorporated into the space of the internet and shared as part of social networks. In addition, many of them also became part of the photographs, videos and sound recordings that I made of the whole process and incorporated in the DVD ROM 'Walking in Barcelona'.

The urban space around the mural was therefore constantly being subjected to different forms of visual construction and shaped sensorially by a great variety of people who interacted with the mural via their bodily movements. Saying this, I want to highlight ‘the potential inherent in bodies to shape space’ (Chang 2013:223). As I described above, the aerial displays of the members of ‘La Carbonería’ collective challenged the official order of the public space through the ways in which they became part of the ‘spectacle’ of the city (Debord 1994) in a manner that was not part of a pedestrian view from the ground but was created through suspension in the air.

This suspension was created by experienced climbers who attached ropes with special knots to an iron cable on the terrace and set up a whole system of ropes with climbing gear. Their knowledge and experiences of climbing made it possible to produce an alternative distribution of the public space of graffiti. The graffiti artists began to paint the mural while being in touch with the space of the wall aerially rather than their tactility being grounded from the pavement. This position fostered new interactions with the space, with other participants and with their ways of painting, which added to the textural dimension of the mural. On each rope there was a permanent communication and involvement between three people: one on the terrace to move the rope to the right or to the left, another painting and a third at one of the windows filling up the buckets with paint and passing them to
the painters. They sometimes communicated through mobile phones but mostly by simply shouting. In one of the two ground floor premises of the squatted building, which had a large gate onto the street, they mixed and created the colours for the mural. The graffiti artists were in charge of this task. They used plastic white paint and mixed it with other colours and colour powder. There they created the general palette of colours for the mural, based on grey for the city skyline, light yellow and light red for the sky and blue for the big balloon. These were the main background colours. Once they had painted the background, they started to use spray can colours as well.

Around the painting of the mural, there were always a great variety of people, who worked, or drank or ate something on the terrace of a coffee shop just in front of the building. Others passed by on their way to work or on their way home and some checked the rubbish containers located in two of the square’s corners to find something to eat or recycle. It was among this human traffic that I had to find my own place in the square so as to set up my camera and tripod. Here, I learnt where I could find the best viewpoint in the light of the morning and in the afternoon. I also had to position the camera and myself so that I did not block the transit of people and cars and where they did not block the vision of the camera if they parked their cars in front of it. I was using a zoom lens that allowed me to take close ups or wide shots. When I took a photograph, set a time lapse sequence or filmed a sequence, I had to decide if I wanted to highlight the details of the mural and how it was
painted and therefore take a close up or pull back and portray the fluidity of the city-scape formed by the transit of cars and the movement of people.

My aim was to film the whole transformation process from the old mural to the new one. I created time-lapses, made photographs, recorded video sequences and edited two videos throughout the whole process. These videos reflected on the forms of collaboration that were going on between ‘La Tele’, an alternative local channel from Barcelona, and myself as a volunteer and researcher. My previous collaboration shaped my access to, and interaction and collaboration with the collective members of ‘La Carbonería’. Then the edited videos allowed me to represent my view of the creation of this mural and to share my involvement with the participants and get some feedback from them. My aim was to approach the public space with a sense of plurality in which the bodies and their movements shape the space in which they live and interact (Chang 2013:215). My images of the mural represented my way of looking at the images made by others on the surface of the city and in connection with the textures of its everyday life. It means in connections with other materials and practices that were developed within the public space around the mural. The graffiti mural formed part of an ‘ocean of materials’ in which human beings, like other organisms were immersed, generating and transforming the city (Ingold 2007:7). The mutable natures of the city have been the main source of inspiration for the interactive video ‘Walking in Barcelona’, in which the viewer can choose between different narratives or roots of the city that are linked to different visual materials, people and ways of filming.

The surface of the building also acquired symbolic meanings in terms of its authorship and the way that the mural was developed. The colours that were used and where and how they were applied was decided by a few of the artists. They also drew the master lines of the mural through two big circles to mark the side of the balloons and a few lines to trace the city skyline. Through different colours, the surface of the building was divided into the city skyline of the mural painted in dark colours by a group of artists (Vaq1, Kike, Piére, Momo, Pablo, Pnao, Jan, Nito, Mizzy, Naiara, Martiña, Mort) and the sky and three air balloons that had escaped from the city were painted in bright ones mainly by Fran, Deru and Roc. Thinking about what colour meant Taussig (2009) states that colour is ‘... alive and intimately
related to the human body’ and therefore the sense of colour is open to speculation (2009: 8). Such speculation can make us reflect on the approach that the city council took towards the palette of colours that can be used in the public space. Here pale colours such as grey and light cream were applied to homogenize the public space and cover the unauthorized graffiti works. Taussig (2009) argues that colours have a history and can acquire significances to the extent of having ‘sacred' qualities (2009:9). This can help us to understand how the council’s position toward bright colours in public space is both speculative and motivated, moving between an attraction toward the bright colours of public artworks made by recognized local artists such as Miró or Gaudí and at the same time a repulsion towards the bright colours of the uncontrolled and unauthorized works of graffiti and street artworks in the streets. Is this movement a question of conditioned ‘taste’ or is it an everyday bodily response rooted in ways of being and making images in public space? The public space and its transformation can be seen as key elements of political practices through different modes of involvement and participation in everyday life.

Taussig (1991) drawing on the distinction made by Walter Benjamin in his complex essay ‘The Work of Art in the age of Mechanical Reproduction’ (1931) between ‘contemplation’ and ‘distraction’, proposes the study of everyday life in the modern city through analysing the ‘distracted’ almost unconscious perceptions of individuals instead of the ‘contemplative’ attitude. Taussig states that this distracted peripheral-vision perception is ‘... unleashed with great vigour by modern life at the crossroads of the city, the capitalist market and modern technology’ (Taussig 1991: 148). Thus the analysis of everyday life has to take into consideration the tactility of vision and other senses to overcome the obvious and reach the ‘...flash of a profane illumination’ (Taussig 1991: 152). The tactility of perception implies looking at the moment in which the meanings of graffiti images emerge from experience as ‘corporeal images’. In this sense, MacDougall (2006) argues that ‘... as we look at things, our perception is guided by cultural and personal interests, but perception is also the mechanism by which these interests are altered and added to’ (2006:2). Analysing the process of the mural painting at ‘La Carbonería’ allows us to uncover the symbolic and cultural sensory order,
which is behind everyday contemplative life, and at the same time to question its meanings.

The scenarios that surrounded and shaped the painting of the mural and the space around it were linked to the neighbourhood’s everyday life. As I stated at the beginning of the thesis, by everyday life, I mean common daily practices in the city, such as shopping at the local market or gathering in the squares. These everyday practices contain different narratives and dialogues that are according to Michel de Certeau (1985), continuously transforming the use of the space. So what happens when everyday practice transgresses the dominant order?

For security reasons, the artists and other participants in the mural of ‘La Carbonería’ covered half of the sidewalk next to the building with red carpets. Some of the neighbours, as I stated above, saw this action more as an appropriation of the pavement than as a security measure. They began to erase the old mural and paint a new background layer. Here, they took some time to decide about the intensity and balance of the colours on the different parts of the wall. Some of the participants began to paint the wall from the windows of the building. When the ropes were ready they began to descend and hang from them with harnesses and other climbing gear so as to reach the entire wall and to have a more comfortable position from which to draw. This first stage could be defined as the rough draft in which they mainly erased the old mural, covering it with the background colours. For this task, they used different kinds of devices, from normal brushes to brushes attached to big sticks and various types of pulverisers filled up with paint. Some of the people wore overalls and soon after they started, everyone who was painting or helping began to get covered by paint. From time to time they stopped to have a look from the distance and discuss what they would have to improve or do next. Meanwhile I was in different locations around the building with my camera. Everyday at lunchtime we had a break and gathered together on the common floor of the building to eat. The food was always vegetarian; the members of the house took in turns to cook each day. This was the normal daily routine during the three weeks that the painting of the mural in ‘La Carbonería’ lasted.
The involvement of the participants was irregular and the timetable for painting very flexible. Many of the participants had their own responsibilities in terms of jobs, family, studies or other personal matters. This meant that some days there were just a couple of people painting. Generally the mornings were very quiet and at lunchtime and afterwards people started to come. Among them, many used to come just to socialize and meet with other friends. In the afternoons, a normal scenario around and within the mural involved people painting, helping, visiting or just moving around. Sometimes they occupied most of the sidewalk next to the mural, where they put a big sofa and some chairs and delimited the pavement. They also opened the shutter gate of the ground floors of the building and played music on a sound system. It transformed the street next to the building into a big gathering of people chatting, painting, helping to paint, smoking and drinking beer. Normally it got busier on Fridays and Saturdays.

The weather was another important factor that changed the everyday routine at the mural. It was March when they started to paint and we had more than a couple of rainy days. This complicated the process and created delays at the wall, firstly, because we had to wait until the wall dried out in order to start again and secondly because it stopped the momentum and mood among the people who were involved in the mural.

As I have mentioned, ‘La Carbonería’ is at a busy intersection of four streets where cars, people, cyclists, motorbikes and also the police continually passed by everyday. Throughout the three weeks that I was there, however, the police only stopped once to supervise the mural. Some of the neighbours had called them, denouncing the conditions of insecurity in which the mural was being painted. Then, a pair of policemen got out of their car and spoke to one of the members of the collective who was on a balcony. They told him that they needed to wear security helmets to do that kind of activity. After that, but only for approximately ten minutes everyone who was painting or helping with the ropes and the paint buckets wore a security helmet. On another day, there was a false alarm and we had to pack everything up and close all the doors of the building. One of the collective members had seen a few mossos, “national police from Catalonia”, vans parked in one of the streets close to the building and they thought that the mossos
were ready to raid the house. They were right. The mossos were there to make a raid but not on their house; they were there to ride a ‘Cash-converter’ business on the same street.

On Sundays the stalls of the ‘San Antoni’ market were erected in one of the streets next to ‘La Carbonería’. This is a historic market. Every Sunday since 1886, this market has been a meeting point for sellers, buyers and collectors, and lately even some curious tourists. Here it is possible to buy all kind of books, magazines and comics from among the numerous stalls of the market or exchange your cards and stamps with other collectors in the side areas of the market. On market days, the space around the mural changed and there were more people moving around than during the rest of the week. The council set up some portable toilets in the street next to the market and in front of the mural. There were also police who controlled the road traffic, which was not allowed to pass through the main street of the market. In addition, the police also mediated in possible conflicts and their presence was intended to counter the pickpockets in the area. The people in the squatted building continued painting the mural as if it were an extended part of the market where people also stopped to look at it, wonder and take some photographs. The majority of the general public in the market were local people and it was common to observe parents and their kids enjoying and sharing their free time together on Sundays. For them and many others, the market was an attraction that represented a change in their everyday life in the city. From early in the morning until two in the afternoon, the market changed the appearance of the space and the practices within it. At two o’clock when the owners of the stalls packed up all their goods into vans or in big wooden crates with wheels, the space began to return to its ordinary weekday appearance. As part of that process the market street was taken over by a group of council cleaners who cleared and tidied everything, leaving it ready for the transit of cars.

Sunday was also an extraordinary day for some of the permanent businesses around the mural. I am going to mention two of them in particular. One was the coffee shop with a large terrace just on the right hand side of the mural, which was owned by Argentines. The other business that I want to describe was a roast chicken store that was situated opposite the mural. The Argentinian coffee shop
was busy most days but on Sundays people queued outside to wait for a free table on the terrace. Here their costumers usually had coffee and other drinks and ate starters such as sandwiches, cakes or Argentinians pasties. The location was excellent, not only for enjoying the sunshine on the terrace, but also for observing how the mural was being painted.

At the roast chicken store, people also waited in a long line on Sundays; the queue continued out of the small store onto the street. This long line of people was seen only on that day of the week. It was a take away service and the customers in this case did not pay too much attention to the mural; they only looked at it when they were waiting for their turn on the street. Then, when they had paid and got their chicken, they immediately walked or drove back to their houses to enjoy their meal.

4.4.1 Around the camera

All of these observations were collected while I filmed and took photographs in ‘La Carbonería’ over the time that the mural was being painted. Through these observations, I want to highlight and contrast the relationship between what I filmed and what I observed around the camera. The camera acted as an extension of my presence but it also allowed me to produce a representation and foster interpretations of the mural among different viewers. It allowed me to capture the changes that the mural had undergone over time and it also gave me access to the fluidity of the social and sensory experiences within and around it. My position within the space and as part of the development of the mural evolved throughout the time that I spent there. At the beginning, I did not know anyone in the group so I spent most of the time by myself next to the camera and the tripod. After a few days, however, I started to interact and talk with many of the people in the house and with others who were participating in the mural or who simply lived nearby and passed by everyday. I spent most of the time in the street and this helped me to get to know many people and share time with them.

Eventually I found three places in the square that surrounded the mural that fulfilled all of my requirements and I alternated between these shooting close ups and wide shots to capture and later represent the transformation of the mural in making. Overall, this practice and experience provided me with a multidimensional view of the mural and the space that surrounded it. Thus my observations and
participation with my camera offered me a way of accessing and communicating the mural as part of larger scenarios, as well as some understanding of the meanings and imageries associated with it. But why is this kind of visual approach relevant to the study of graffiti and street art in Barcelona? Does it help us to understand and theorize how graffiti and street art form part of the city? And what are the best visual strategies to approach these kinds of practices in public space?

In thinking critically about process, one of my aims was to capture the temporal transformation of the public space through the creation of the mural and for this I made a series of time-lapse films. The camera was fixed on a tripod and I set it up to take one photograph of the action every five seconds. As I said above, I did this from different positions and perspectives around the mural and over different extended time periods (usually more than an hour). Then I processed and reassembled the photographs from each position and time periods in my computer to create one second of video for every twenty-five photographs. In the same way that the camera could not focus on all of the social events and material objects that occurred the outcomes of the time-lapses shaped new ways of seeing the mural that had escaped my perception during the making process of the mural. It was a mural in fast motion in which cars, people, sunlight, shade, the clouds in the sky and the painting of the mural seemed to flow and interact with each other. But these time-lapse videos were something more than a new way of seeing the creation of this mural in Barcelona. The time-lapses formed part of a greater compound of multiple images of people, objects and relations that I selected throughout my fieldwork.

The images coexisted in the same space but in different temporalities, or what Bergson calls ‘durées’. This idea posits looking at these images according to ‘intuitive’ insights as part of multiple presents with different, multiple, pasts (Bergson in Mullarkey & Mille 2013:1). Thus they were part of my fieldwork and memories, but they enclose information that reflects on public space, the use of the camera and my role as an anthropologist throughout this process. The graffiti artworks are not only isolated images; they also form part of the fluidity of the city. Here, the images of graffiti coexist not only with the presents of the buildings, the people and the city, but also as Bergson argues with their multiple pasts. This
fluidity, however, can be broken with the interactions between different bodies. It fosters perceptions that are, as Barakianou (2013) states reading Bergson ‘... a possibility amongst other possibilities, that the body, through its action, has chosen in relation to other bodies, to other matter’ (2103:142). Therefore the phenomenological approach applied in this research implies multiple embodiments: during the time in which I was filming, taking photographs and participating in the mural creation, and others, when I watched them again, and reassembled and edited the visual material. The following photo essay is an example of it.
4.4.2 The mural and its somatic plurality

If we analyse the mural in ‘La Carbonería’ from the perspective of the council institution of Paisatge Urba, “Urban Landscape”, we can find a quite particular way of understanding this mural as part of the public space. This institution, as I have mentioned before, is in charge of the regulation and uses of the public space in Barcelona. In this sense, the painting of this mural was a reflection of its competences. Following the official regulations, ‘Paisatge Urba’ had a duty to disallow the painting of the mural and to fine the people who were painting it. Thus when I interviewed Xavier Olivella, the director of ‘Paisatge Urba’, I asked him, ‘why was the mural in ‘La Carbonería’ allowed?’ His answer was quite a surprise to me. He said that ‘…’Paisatge Urba’ respects the elements of public space that belonged to the historical memory of the city’. From his point of view, the mural had achieved a level of historical memory in the city within four years of its creation. This response is intriguing when one considers that the new mural implied the erasing of the old one, which in theory was part of the historical memory of the city. His answer, however, made me think about how the old mural was not extinguished but lived on as a layer of the new one.

In this way, the mural could be seen as part of the city palimpsest that encrypted a plurality of relations and stories over time. Perhaps this is what the representative of ‘Paisatge Urba’ meant when he said that the murals were part of the historical memory of the city. But for whom was and which perception of the city was linked to this memory? I argue that the institutional position in this case can be understood in terms of what Benjamin (1969)[1931] defines as the ‘phantasmagoric sensorium of modernity’ (Benjamin in Buck-Morss 1992: 24). In Benjamin’s phantasmagoric reality, human experiences are impoverished by the daily shocks33 of the modern world. The overflow of external stimuli in everyday life ends up blocking the ‘synaesthetic system’34 of human perception and

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33 Benjamin centres his view of modern experience on shocks and how, in modern daily life many ‘…excessive energies at work in the external world…’ are the source of shock impulses that are stopped by the shield of the consciousness without leaving deep traces of memory (Benjamin [1969], Baudelaire, trans. German by Harry Zohn, Bristol: NLB (1973), pp.115.

34 According to Susan Buck-Morss (1992) the conception of a ‘synaesthetic system’ is linked in Benjamin’s work to Freud’s understanding of the ego “ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body,” the place from which “both external and internal perceptions may spring”; the ego “may be thus regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body” (Freud, The Ego and the Id [1923], trans. Joan Rivere [New York: W. W. Norton, 1960], pp. 15 and 16n).
producing automatic responses and impoverished experiences. Following Freud’s theory, Benjamin argues that the surface of the human body mediates between the external world and the internal ego of the individuals. In Freud’s (1960 [1923]) words, the human ego ‘may be thus regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body’ (1960 [1923]: 15-16). But can we approach the surface of the city in similar terms and is this surface of the city a projection of something?

The fact that the council’s representative understood the mural, which is part of the surface of the city, as an element of the city’s historical memory made me wonder about the inner realm of the city. Thus it could be argued that the historical memory of a city contains its traditions, customs or buildings and how they are linked to the everyday life in the city. Indeed, it could be said that for the director of ‘Paisatge Urba’ the painting of the new mural on the squatted building represented the repetition of the old one on the same building and on the same surface.

In contrast, the members of ‘La Carboneria’ collective saw the mural as a way to directly participate in, and transgress, the order of public space and to explore new possibilities within it. They wanted to transform the everyday life of the city and through their actions obtain social support for their cause and leave traces of these actions on the surface of the city. These transformative actions, however, were limited to the space-time framework of the mural painting and ultimately derived from the bodily sensations of the participants in this process. During that time the surface of the city changed its ‘phantasmagoric’ and permanent reality and was imbricated together with the surface of the participants’ bodies. This temporal situation fostered the imagination of the people who were involved in the mural and incorporated the outside world as a form of empowerment and reflection in contrast to the mimetic adaptation of the life in the city (Buck-Morss 1992: 17). In this case, Benjamin’s claims about ‘phantasmagoria’ as a quality of modernity were overturned through the practical experimentation and transformation of the city space by some of its inhabitants. The overflow of stimuli in the city and its anaesthetic effects on the experiences of the city’s inhabitants were not always produced with the same aims but also trying to awake and transform the urban space and the everyday life within it.
Thus I propose that the building and its murals must be approached as part of what I conceptualized in chapter one as the ‘graffiti texture’ of the city. This is an abstract and complex form that is permanently shaped by individual and collective subjectivities. In the surface of the city, therefore, the outside flows embody the multiplicity of its inhabitants. The texture of the city, as Wegenstein (2010) states with regard to the human skin within the relationship between body and media, is ‘...porous and fluid, the site of encounter and exposure’ between the different inhabitants of the city ‘...rather than a site of exclusion and closure’ (2010:33).

In this sense, it is possible to look at the building in terms of the people who lived in it over time and the different activities that they practised. The name of ‘La Carboneria’ (place where coal is sold in Spanish) was given to the collective after one of the activities practised in the building. Between 1940 and 1950 the building was part of the coalyard of the neighbourhood. Today the coal merchant practice has almost being extinguished in the city but it still survives in the inhabitants’ memories and imaginations, linked for instance to the objects that the squatters found in the house. Other workers, like those who came to Barcelona at the beginning of the twentieth century to build the underground lines and the ‘San Antoni’ neighbourhood, lived in this building too. The plain and simple appearance of the building, contrasts with the big windows and balconies of most of the buildings of the ‘Eixample’. Thus the windows and balconies of the façade imitate the small dimensions and form of the typical buildings of old neighbourhoods in the city, such as the ‘Rabal’.

If the building is approached in terms of recent narratives and proprietaries, it encloses traces of the financial and economic crisis in Spain. Thus at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the building was bought by ‘FBEX Promo Inmobiliaria’, a real estate company, which evicted the old tenants with the aim of building new profitable apartments in the downtown of the city. However, from 2004 to 2008, the building was empty until the squatters collective squatted it in 2008. At that point, the world economic and financial crisis hit Spain, deflating its housing bubble. The banks closed the credit line to the construction companies and many of them, like the one in our case, began to experience great economic and financial problems. In 2008, ‘FBEX’ tried to evict the squatters from the house and the
company took them to the court, and won the case. However this was not the end of the construction company's economic problems and eventually it had to declare itself bankrupt. This circumstance favoured the squatters and delayed the eviction order until four years later. Meanwhile the building's ownership passed to the Barclays Bank in compensation for the real estate company's debts.

The same process has been repeated throughout the last years of the economic crisis in Spain, provoking evictions, company bankruptcies and confiscations of property by banks. The representative of the council, 'Paisatge Urba', probably did not think about these kinds of memories as historical memory, although it is embedded in the texture of the mural. The surface of the city, in this case represented by the building of 'La Carbonería', mediates between the external and internal worlds of the city through institutional statements to filter and communicate only certain memories. In 2014, Barclays executed the eviction order and removed the squatters from the building. This involved a large police deployment and the resistance and protest of the squatter collective in the building and the streets. Now the building is empty again and its owner, Barclays Bank, has applied to the council for a demolition order so as to build new apartments.

Thinking in terms of the porous and fluid nature of the city textures, allows us to consider other possibilities and to think of the mural as the writing of a new layer on the city palimpsest. In 2014, the local journalist Lluis Permanyer (2014) wrote an article in 'La Vanguardia' after the eviction of 'La Carbonería', in which he highlighted the historical and locational value of the building and criticized the role of the council, which had not even catalogued and protected this building. Permanyer claimed, using the urban register to justify his affirmation, that the building of 'La Carbonería' was the first construction in the 'Eixample' in 1864. This means that it was the first building of the modern city of Barcelona.

It can be said then that the building mediates between multiple perceptions and understandings shaped by the fluidity of everyday life in the city. For instance, the building was seen as a social centre and as a platform of communication for the squatter collectives in the city. It was also seen as a source of economic income for the bank, housing for workers and a business place for coal-merchants. All of these
examples show the separation between the historical meanings linked to the space and the perception of it according to a plurality of sensibilities.

If we focus our interpretation of the mural on its collective aesthetics it is possible to arrive at the following assumptions. Firstly, there was not just one author but many, who shared similar ways of seeing and acting in the city. Secondly, it is also certain that the squatter collective was not an isolated and sectarian group of people; it was embedded in the social, economic and historical fabric of this city. In addition, we can state that the local authorities and institutions were aware of the existence of this collective and its intervention in the public space. As far as I know, there was no specific agreement between the local council and this collective. Throughout the time that I spent with the members of ‘La Carbonería’, I could not identify any affinity and communication with the local institutions. In contrast, they had a reactionary and critical position toward the local council and its urban politics and policies. Meanwhile, the representatives of the local council had quite a negative view of the graffiti and street art phenomenon in the city, which they thought of as formed by individualities and without strength as a collective in the city.

The fact that a collective of the city painted the mural seems to be a key factor in understanding its existence in the public space. In this sense, most of the squatted buildings that I visited and knew in Barcelona such as ‘Los Bloques’ in Vallcarca and ‘Can Vies’ in Sants had their façades painted with graffiti murals. Making reference to Ranciére (2004), it can be argued that the squatted buildings of Barcelona enclose their own ‘distribution of the sensible’ that transgresses the official order over the public space around them. Thus using the process of the mural painting in the squatted building of ‘La Carbonería’, what I am proposing here is an understanding of the graffiti and street art in the public space of Barcelona in terms of its practices, sensorialities and contexts. Therefore the ‘aesthetic’ regime and the murals of the squatters movement in Barcelona is contained in autonomous and collectivized spaces where political claims such as the defence of animal rights, the promotion of the veganism or the support of eco-anarchist prisoners end up being localized and being visible through the creation of big graffiti murals on the surfaces of squatted buildings.
Chapter 5 ‘La Escocesa’: A fabric of images

5.1 Introduction

‘Each city expresses its fears and deliriums, its desires and utopias, its revenges and prides, and like a literature open book mixes fiction and reality; graffiti is another of the great contemporary tales which coming from the deep silences and repressions of the cities and their citizens talks and expresses itself over the same skin epidermis marking the city like an massive tattoo in permanent transformation’ (Silva 1989:51).

As I have mentioned before in this thesis, the practice of graffiti and street art in Barcelona has been transformed throughout the last twenty years. The explosion of this phenomenon in the 1990s coincided with the transformation of the central district neighbourhood of ‘El Raval’. The aim of the city council was to renew the ‘urban texture’ (Degen 2008) of this neighbourhood, transforming its reputation of marginality, drugs abuse and prostitution. According to Degen (2008), ‘... the Raval’s ‘urban texture’ was defined by a multi-layered, complex and diverse structure, which today still gives the impression of a chaotic unplanned space’ (ibid: 80). The urban renewal of ‘El Raval’ triggered mass evictions, real estate speculation and the demolition of buildings. During this process of transformation, the number of abandoned buildings and empty building sites in the neighbourhood grew. Such spaces became the perfect spots for the practice of graffiti and street art.

Those urban inscriptions contained three of the main features that Armando Silva (1987) considered essential in talking about graffiti. They were ‘marginal’ because they were developed outside of the official channels, ‘anonymous’ because the authors were usually disturbing a particular social order and transgressing its prohibitions, and ‘spontaneous’, being linked to the psychological circumstances of the graffiti authors who took advantage of a particular time and space to accomplish their works (1987:32). In Barcelona these main features ended up being mixed and transformed with others such as the marketization of graffiti, the artistic development of this practice and its regularization by the local council and street art associations.
This chapter addresses different kinds of transformations in connection with the graffiti scene in Barcelona, the graffiti artists and the city. Some of the residents who were my informants were also artists in the art centre of ‘La Escocesa’ and I reference them to develop this argument. Most of these graffiti artists developed their graffiti and muralist skills in the 1990s. Today their artworks are known internationally and they usually contribute to graffiti documentaries and different graffiti and street art magazines and books. Many of their murals and artworks are made in other cities, on canvas or here on the walls of ‘La Escocesa’ and its surroundings in the neighbourhood of Poble Nou in Barcelona. As I have argued above in this thesis, the different conceptions of space, the value of visual objects, the practices of street art within different contexts, the different means of communication such as sculpture, performance and video and the transformation through adaptation of the street art in the city can be approached according to what Rancière (2006) has defined as an active ‘distribution of the sensible’.

As Zosen, one of the graffiti artists in ‘La Escocesa’, told me: ‘... graffiti artists are able to read the city’. Thus the distribution of the urban space for graffiti artists is encoded within some kind of sensory order that can be read and transformed by them. One way of thinking about this is through reference to the cities created under the Spanish colonialism of Latin America, which were controlled by the so-called ‘letrados’, who applied their writing abilities creating what Angel Rama (1996) defines as the ‘lettered’ cities. The ‘letrados’ planned the urban space of cities and encoded them with requirements linked to colonization, commerce, defence and religion, which were imposed upon the inhabitants (Rama 1996:1). The graffiti artists, in contrast, explore the labyrinth of streets reading the surfaces of the cities to create artworks as a way of rewriting the city in subversive and resistant forms against the established order.

Today, the space of Barcelona is mainly designed and ordered according to the principles of the ‘Barcelona Model’. The aesthetic of this model can be linked to what Tim Edensor (2005) calls the normative and modernist aesthetic, ‘... a regulation replete with design codes purporting to embody common-sense notions through which ‘appropriate’ visual appearance masquerades as objectively correct’ (2005:73). These codes are related to the colours, textures or distribution of spaces
and are applied across urban spaces such as shopping centres, streets and even whole neighbourhoods. These ordered worlds, however, coexist with the urban life and its constant processes of adaptation and transformation in the city. The space of ‘La Escocesa’ and the work and practice of its graffiti artists are examples of how the city still offers space and time in which new aesthetics can be recorded.

5.2 Dialogic strategies

The use of dialogic strategies in ethnographic research is based not only on learning about other people communicate through verbal language but also on taking into account feelings, signs and other non-verbal ways of communication. The context of fieldwork is continually renegotiated (Clifford 1980) and the ethnographic task within it is not only to record the ‘indigenous’ view of a shared life world but also to reveal the interactive issues that appear in this relationship (Page 1988:165). Graffiti and street artists also foster dialogues through their artworks in public space and I have incorporated this dialogic aspect into my research through the voices of the different participants in juxtaposition to my own.

Thus the first time that I visited ‘La Escocesa’, I thought about the relationship between time and space in connection with the transformation of the former industrial factory where ‘La Escocesa’ is located into an art centre. I wondered how the transformation of this particular factory complex was connected with changes in the neighbourhood and in Barcelona as a city. This also made me think about how this process of transformation affected the artists who worked in ‘La Escocesa’
and the local city-space. With these questions in mind, I began to contact, get to know and interview a group of graffiti and street artists in ‘La Escocesa’. My aim was to share with them some of my arguments. In this way, I wanted to foster reflexive dialogues about the transformation of the city and the ways in which graffiti and street art exist within it today. The following section contains part of the conversations, reflexions and debates that we had.

After the council of Barcelona passed the new civic ordinance in 2006, members of the community of graffiti and street artists met several times with the representatives of ‘Paisaje Urbano’,35 the council department in charge of the application of this regulation. The first meeting was described to me during one of the conversations that I had in ‘La Escoesa’, in this case with the graffiti artist and philosophy student Kafre,36 who belonged, together with Zosen37 and other artists such as Maze, Oldie, Pez, Sae and Skum, to the renowned ONG graffiti crew, Ovejas Negras or “Black Sheep”. Kafre and Zosen assisted at the meeting to discuss and find out how this civic ordnance would affect the practice of graffiti in the city and Kafre remembered it as follows:

‘We sat around the same table with people who represented other collectives that used public space for their practices and activities. There were representatives of the skaters, people from the GREC theatre, representatives of the Sputnik program who used to organize concerts in the streets and there were also street musicians who played in ‘Las Ramblas’. Then the council representative opened the meeting, talked about different themes and introduced us to how the new civic regulation would affect the use of public space and so on... Later we started to give our different points of view and at some point in the discussion, the council representative addressed each of us individually; firstly he pointed at the representatives of the GREC theatre and told them that they would talk privately and that they shouldn’t worry… that happened there, just in from of us, I could not believe it! Then he told the musicians that the council would regulate their activity. With the skaters he mentioned that skating would be possible only in some specific locations in the city, and finally he looked at us and said; the graffiti it’s over in the city (after a few seconds of silence). We had taken with us all of the graffiti and street art books in which we appeared with the ONG crew, and we asked him, but how, if people come to Barcelona to see graffiti and street art and take photographs of it, if Barcelona is partly known internationally through the work that we have done in the public space of the city? And he answered, yes that is right but we don’t want any more of that kind of low cost

35 http://w110.bcn.cat/portal/site/PaisatgeUrba?lang=es_ES
36 http://lleonka.tumblr.com/
37 http://www.animalbanido.com/tofulines/
tourism; now we want quality tourism and graffiti does not generate that quality tourism... So you have to forget about painting in the streets from now on. We were really in shock and that was really the end. They started to implement their ‘Model of Barcelona’ to attract tourists who would come to the hotels of the city and walk comfortably in the streets without being visually invaded by graffiti...’

Since 2006 the people who practise graffiti and street art in Barcelona have had to find new alternative approaches to produce and exhibit their artworks. The central district of the city, once their sanctuary and main exhibition spot, has lost all of these possibilities and has become a graffiti and street art free zone. Here their interventions have been criminalized and sanctioned with high penalties under the new council regulation. At the same time the council has imposed its colour palette on the public space of this part of the city based on pale colours such as grey and cream. Such aesthetic regimes are described by Tim Edensor (2005) as a common sense assumption in ‘modern’ and ‘postmodern’ landscapes in western cities. In this sense, ‘colours should be generally unblemished and distinct, generally somewhat muted or pastel coloured, except where a bright colour provides a counterpoint to general tone or is utilized to highlight a particular feature or function’ (2005:74). The new regulation has created a new distribution of public space and according to Kafre, it has pushed them to look for new areas and spaces in other parts of the city.

That same day, in the studio in ‘La Escocesa’, while I was speaking with Kafre, the graffiti artist Tom14, who is originally from Brazil but has lived in Barcelona for more than 10 years, had been ordering an old suitcase full of spray paint colours for a work that he had that night in a club. Tom14, as with the rest of the graffiti artists in ‘La Escocesa’, had experienced the rise and fall of graffiti in the city. At some point, he got involved in the conversation and added, ‘...graffiti has been transformed into another public space business managed by the council which just wants to obtain economic income from it...They say that Barcelona is a cultural city and they show off about how people enjoy the street life in the city but it is all fake...’

He also complained about the penalties policy that the council had put in place against graffiti artists: ‘...now it is even difficult to paint business shutters because they impose penalties not only on us but also on the business owner’. The painting of business gates had become one of the main sources of income for some of the local
graffiti and street artists. However, the designs and colours did not fit with the council’s colour palette and they were also sanctioned by the council.

5.3 Dialogues between graffiti and anthropology

Returning to the time line of my fieldwork in Barcelona, I knew ‘La Escocesa’ through the multidisciplinary artist, Jorge Rodriguez Gerada. At that time, he was a resident artist in ‘La Escocesa’ and I met him in his studio. As one of the founding members of the ‘Culture Jamming’ movement in New York in the early 1990s, Jorge has extensive experience of artistic and subversive interventions in public space. Jorge is a Cuban-American citizen who has lived most of his life in New York, from where he decided to try working in Barcelona in 2002. When I met Jorge, he was preparing a solo exhibition in one of the most prestigious galleries of contemporary art in Barcelona called ‘N2’. That was his first exhibition in a gallery and it ended up being a great success. Later that same year, he and his family moved away from Barcelona to the smaller city of Tudela in northern Spain and I lost contact with him for the rest of my fieldwork.

At the time when I knew him, he had been working on large-scale ephemeral charcoal drawings on public space walls as part of his ‘Identity’ series. In relation to this series, he explained to me that he only worked on certain surface walls that inspired him to create hyper realistic drawings using charcoal as a metaphor for the passing of time and the transformation of society and the city. His aim was to open up dialogs with the residents of the neighbourhoods where he created his works, making an analogy between the changeable and fragile character of his charcoal portraits and the idea of belonging and the memories of the people.

38 http://www.jorgerodriguezgerada.com/

39 Naomi Klein (2000) describes in her book ‘No Logo’ through Gerada’s work in New York, the key features of this movement: ‘the most sophisticated cultural jams are not stand-alone and parodies but interceptions – counter-messages that hack into a corporation’s own method of communication to send a message starkly at odds with the one that was intended’ (2000:281).

40 http://www.n2galeria.com/
The concept and intention behind his ‘Identities’ series and the progressive disappearance of the charcoal portraits could be seen as a reflection of how the space fades out and is transformed with the passing of time and people. This encounter with Jorge and his artworks was very inspiring for my own research. The ‘Identities’ series enclosed multiple dialogs between the artist and the collaborators, between the artist and the city space and its surfaces and textures and between the city space, the inhabitants and the artworks in public space over time. I incorporated this dialogic dimension into my own research so as to share and contrast different perspectives on the graffiti and street art in Barcelona with the participants in my ethnography. During the first stage of my research, my conversations with Jorge opened up the possibility of other dialogues with the people who had participated in his ‘Identity’ series as subjects of his street artworks portraits in Barcelona. Jorge’s works offered me the possibility of exploring the overlapping of identities between himself and his subjects in his street artworks.

I met the protagonists of Jorge’s portraits in their houses and went to the places where Jorge had drawn them as large-scale images. Some of these portraits had disappeared or been replaced by new buildings; others had almost faded away due to the passing of time and I could see only traces and transformed versions of the original ones. I shared the aims of my research with Jorge’s collaborators and learnt about their experiences and memories as part of Jorge’s project, the neighbourhood where they lived and the city of Barcelona.

This dialogic approach implied, therefore, not only talking with the collaborators and main protagonists of Jorge’s artworks but also exploring the relationship
between the time of the artworks and the time of the buildings in the city. There were different senses of time at work here and this was revealed through collaborative and antagonistic dialogs between the different actors and elements such as the materials, buildings and textures of wall surfaces involved in Jorge’s interventions. This helped me to see the city as incomplete and always in a state of transformation. Thus the owners of the empty building sites where Jorge Gerada conceived his works probably had quite a different perspective of those same walls. Jorge told me that when he started to paint his ‘Identity’ portraits on the standing walls of demolished buildings, by chance he met the owner of one of the building sites: ‘...he asked me if I had drawn the portrait on that wall and I answered that I was the author... He liked it very much and gave me his authorization to make more of my works on the walls of many other empty building sites that he owned in the city centre of Barcelona’.

The same building sites also attracted the attention of people with other roles who wanted to play their part in fostering transformations in the city. These roles could include the architect who visualizes and designs the space with new walls and floors, or the engineer who calculates the tolerance of the ground and decides what materials have to be used to fulfil the council’s security rules. Then there are the builders who interpret and apply these calculations and designs to build the new structure. This process continues as people move to the new houses and the space keeps being transformed with the passing of time. Graffiti artists, construction developers and the council itself claim their legitimacy over the transformations of the city but they mean different things by it. In this sense and following Judith
Butler (2012), we have to think about how the space and the non-human bodies within it act on our bodies in the same way that our political actions emerge 'between' other bodies and are also registered by other senses (2012:118).

The transformative nature of Jorge's artworks in public space allows us to think in a reflexive and critical way about the aesthetics of public space in Barcelona and how his art fits within it. Does Jorge's art create political spaces and foster critical thinking about the transformation of public space and the city? Or do his artworks act as a camouflage for other transformations of the city linked to evictions and urban speculations? Although the large scale portraits covered and renewed the walls of demolished buildings in the city with the passing of time the charcoal portraits started to fade out. Alongside this transformation of the portraits, the image of the city was also transformed becoming like the portraits, more crumbled and blurred. This transformative ambiguity in Jorge's artworks can be thought about through anthropology as ‘productive tension’ (Schneider and Wright 2006 in Strohm 2012:112) between different images. It was this first experience of Jorge's work that marked my fieldwork and shaped my ethnographic work by encouraging me to engage in collaborations based on equality and ‘practical experimentation’ (Strohm 2012: 118) and think in terms of different kinds dialogue.

In one of those dialogues, Maria, who I mentioned in chapter three, told me about her experience as part of Jorge's artwork:

Maria: ‘Since they moved to live in this building, we always had a good relationship. He was also the president of the building community association, and I don’t know, he came up one day… and I knew that he took photographs and all that… and he came up one day … we had painters in the house, yes we had painters and I was wearing my housecoat and he asked me: sit down here I want to take a photograph of you … But
look how I look!!! I said. No, no, don’t worry, don’t worry... you look at this side, he said... and it was because he wanted to represent the changes through my expression and my sight looking at one side, as if I was saying how the neighbourhood had changed around me ... and yes I did it...

Question: What did you feel when you saw yourself in the street?

‘It did not bother me, only in the local market, they asked me: Maria, have you been painted on a wall of the street? (in Catalan language) and I said, yes, yes, yes, yes ... and my sisters in law went to see it too , and one of them said: Ahh! It is not you (in Catalan language); and then I even showed them the photographs from the newspaper, because at that time my sisters in law and I used to meet and go on trips together... These trips were organized each month by a local centre for elderly people and while we could we went but now we are very old. They are even older than me; my husband was their younger brother... Well coming back to what we were talking about, I showed them the photographs of the painting and they told me, this is not you... but the rest of the people, they recognized me. And my older daughter told me: Mum... in ten years time you will be like that...’

Finally, Maria also explained to me how long her portrait had lasted in the street, which was more than six years. Maria said: ‘we always thought that it would fade out sooner... The portrait disappeared afterwards when the council demolished the old building to build a new one and a new square next to it. The fact that they had to demolish the building was the reason why they left Jorge to make his drawings’.

5.4 La Escocesa: An ‘Island of Freedom’

Today ‘La Escocesa’ is an art centre, having being created by local artists in 1999. In the description that follows I want to discuss how its walls contain stories that can take us on a journey through the industrial and post industrial times in the city, the social movements and resistance processes in the area, the history of the working class in Barcelona and the urban transformation of this part of the city through urban renewals and graffiti and street artworks.

In 2006, the real estate company ‘Renta Corporacion’ purchased the area where this art centre is situated to build offices and houses and evicted the resident artists by the end of 2007. The same year, however, the city council approved a new plan in which ‘La Escocesa’ was catalogued as Industrial Heritage. This change in attitude was fostered by the strategic cultural scheme called ‘Factories for artistic
creations’ through which some factory constructions in the city have been protected and transformed into cultural centres. The council returned the management of the space to ‘La Assiació d’idees’, a group of artists from different disciplines who have continued their projects in ‘La Escocesa’.

‘La Escocesa’ was the name of the biggest company that occupied most of this industrial complex, built in 1885 in the neighbourhood of ‘Poble Nou’. In 1894 some craftsmen from Scotland came to Barcelona and taught women from the neighbourhood new crochet stitch techniques. That encounter led to the company being named of ‘La Escocesa’, “Scottish woman”, and marked the beginning of an industrial adventure based on the manufacture of chemical and textile products that lasted until 1984. Today parts of these factory buildings have been converted into art studios, and exhibition and community spaces and are self-managed by some of the artists in ‘La Escocesa’.

The space is also used as a community centre, which offers workshops and other activities to the residents of the neighbourhood and to any other resident or visitor to the city. The creation of this art centre must be contextualized in parallel with the recent processes of the urban development of the ‘Poble Nou’ neighbourhood and the processes of resistance against this urban renewal from the residents and other collectives of the city. ‘Poble Nou’ is also known as the ‘Catalan Manchester’. From the mid 19th century it grew to become one of the main industrial centres in Barcelona. During the industrial times this area of the city became one of the ‘reddest’ (leftist) districts, a stronghold of anarchism and socialism (MacNeill 1999: 224).
At the beginning of the 21st century, the local council focused its most ambitious urban renewal on the development of the 22@ urban plan. The neighbourhood of ‘Poble Nou’ became the object of this transformation towards a new space, driven by innovation, technology, knowledge and science. The City council described the project on its web page as follows: the ‘22@Barcelona project will transform two hundred hectares of industrial land of Poblenou into an innovative district offering modern spaces for the strategic concentration of intensive knowledge-based activities. This initiative is also a project of urban refurbishment and a new model of the city providing a response to the challenges posed by the knowledge-based society’. However, not everyone agreed with the aims and methods of the 22@ urban plan. On April of 2005, the local architect and urban planner Josep Maria Montaner wrote an article in the Spanish newspaper ‘El Pais’ about the discontent regarding the 22@. Montaner concluded his article as follows: ‘In this horizon of a city in crisis that delights the tourists but disappoints its own inhabitants, the Can Ricart conflict has become an unique opportunity to recover the good aims of the 22@ and reformulate the evolution of the city creating a positive precedent. Can Ricart can be a good catalyser and it is a golden opportunity’.

The ‘Can Ricart’ movement against the 22@ was developed in what Isaac Marrero (2008) calls a laboratorio de creatividad urbana, “urban creative lab”, (2008:200). With this concept Marrero refers to the common space of communication created by people from different sectors such as traditional industry, sciences, technology and art, who have collaborated and created synergies: writing alternative proposals, organizing art protest interventions, sharing spaces, producing information and organizing debates and assemblies. The so-called ‘Can Ricart’ movement tried to stop the evictions and demolition of factory buildings, which they saw as part of the local cultural patrimony and examples of working class memory. The end of this struggle did not stop the development of the 22@ urban plan, although some of the factories, such as ‘La Escocesa’, were catalogued as industrial heritage of the city and recognized as cultural centres under the label of Fabricas de Creacion, “Creating Factories”, by the city council.

42 http://www.22barcelona.com/content/blogcategory/49/280/lang,en/
43 http://www.22barcelona.com/content/blogcategory/51/421/
44 http://elpais.com/diario/2005/04/19/catalunya/1113872842_850215.html
‘La Escocesa’ was possibly one of the most positive achievements of the resistance actions and dialogues between the council and the representatives of the social movement. Graffiti and street artists were also involved in this movement (2005-2007) and they used the walls of the factories to express, through images and slogans, their position and disagreement with the council’s urban planning. Isaac Marrero (2008) included some of this graffiti in his thesis ‘Can Ricart: The Factory of conflict’, which focused on the development of this social movement in Poble Nou and produced slogans in Spanish such as:

*Àlojar sin Alejar*, “Housing without moving away”,

*Un desalojo no nos para*, “An eviction will not stop us,”

*Necesidad es ley*, “Necessity is law”,

And in Catalan language:

*Participacio o Simulacio?* “Participation or Simulation?”

*Espais creatius in lluita*, “Spaces created upon struggle”,

*Prou Especulacio*, “Stop the speculation”,

*La Ciutat pel sus habitants*, “The city for its inhabitants”,

*Autogestion l Emancipacio*, “Self-management and emancipation”,

(Marrero 2008:247)
The economic crisis meant that many of the construction companies involved in the 22@ plan went bankrupt or stopped their projects in the area. This left an urban landscape made up of concrete structures of unfinished buildings, and empty, half demolished or burnt factories. Today the old and abandoned industrial factories of the neighbourhood are mixed up with the new image of the neighbourhood which is shaped by glass buildings that stand above low houses, the workshops of craftsmen and empty sites that have survived the urban renewal helped by the financial, real estate and construction crisis.

The graffiti artists who I met in ‘La Escocesa’ found in this space and its surroundings the surfaces and possibilities to adapt and keep developing their graffiti and street art skills. The abandoned factories that surround the art centre of ‘La Escocesa’ contain walls for experimentation, interaction and exhibition by local and international graffiti and street artists. As with other recent renewal processes in the city, such as the one I described in the neighbourhood of ‘El Raval’ in the previous chapter, the space of transformation has become a ‘small island of freedom’ (Arendt 1968:6) to materialize graffiti and street artworks. In this case, graffiti and street artists have access not only to the temporarily abandoned buildings of this neighbourhood but also to the walls of the art centre of ‘La Escocesa’ on a more permanent basis, where they are treated as professional artists. In this context, I see the actions of graffiti and street artists as an active ‘distribution of the sensible’, which conveys different notions of aesthetics in connection with the graffiti practice and the renewal process in the city.
5.5. Making and thinking graffiti

My encounters with the graffiti artists in ‘La Escocesa’ were based on dialogues that addressed different understandings of the city and its space and how they incorporated those elements into their ways of making graffiti. I used anthropology case studies to share with them my views about the city and its transformation.

The first of these dialogues in ‘La Escocesa’ was with Zosen45, the main organizer of the Festival de Murales, “Murals Festival” in ‘La Escocesa’, which I will describe at the end of this chapter. Our meeting took more than two months to organize due to Zosen’s busy agenda. During the period of time in which we were trying to arrange our meeting, he had two exhibitions, one in Madrid and the second in Tokyo, where he spent more than a month. Finally, he found some time to spend with me and we met in his studio in ‘La Escocesa’ on one of the days of Talleres Abiertos,46 “open studios”.

Zosen is considered one of the key figures of the graffiti scene in the city and his visual language, according to the anthropologist Rafael Schacter (2013) embodies ‘a unique anarcho-primitivist aesthetic’ (2013: 312). Thus Zosen’s artworks are not only based on rich and vivid colours that take forms of naïve or tribal symbols but they are also charged with serious political intents and activism, which characterize the graffiti aesthetics of Barcelona (Schacter 2013:312). In this sense, Zosen told me ‘... when I was younger I was in contact with social centres (squatted centres) and anti-fascist collectives. If I had lived in another city or country I wouldn’t have been so close to the libertarian movement. In this city there was an anarchist revolution and you don’t find that in many other countries in the world... and there are still some people in Barcelona that are influenced by that utopianism and those ideas and they think that there are alternative ways of doing things ... If it hadn’t been like that we would not be painting graffiti’.

45 http://www.animalbandido.com/tofulines/
46 The Talleres Abiertos, “Open Studios”, weekend is an initiative organized by the neighbourhood’s art and craft centres, of which there are a total of seventeen, to bring the local artists and what they do closer to the public.
That same day I also met two other graffiti artists, Kenor\(^{47}\) and H101,\(^{48}\) who shared a studio with Zosen in ‘La Escocesa’ and were part of the ‘Collectivo A + B’. Kenor and H101 were working on a collaborative painting on canvas using colours from spray cans but applying them with a brush. Before we started the interview, Zosen hung some of his paintings on the wooden walls of the studio and took a few t-shirts printed with his designs out of a plastic bag. He then displayed the t-shirts on one side of the studio and next to them he placed a paper tag on which he wrote 10 Euros each to inform and attract possible buyers. They were expecting visitors for the whole day and some of them might have been potential buyers, although, as they told me, at the last event they had not been very successful in terms of sales.

We were sitting on a sofa and I explained to him what my project was about. I told him how curious I was about ‘La Escocesa’ and its transformation into an art centre. I moved back in time to imagine the building as the textile and chemical factory it once was. At that time, I kept imagining and telling Zosen that the space was used by workers in their everyday production tasks; they transformed materials into commodities that were eventually sold in the market. Today the same space is used to produce art, organize exhibitions and workshops and in the case of the ‘Murals Festival’, the walls of its buildings were transformed into mural artworks by graffiti artists and seen, appreciated and photographed by the general public. The former life of the industrial factory was still visible in the structure of the building that formed ‘La Escocesa’ and I wondered if that influenced the work

\(^{47}\) http://www.elkenor.com/
\(^{48}\) http://www.hcientouno.com/
of the artists. I thought that if this factory building was conserved by the institutions as part of the local cultural patrimony and the workers’ history and memory in the city, it also enclosed some sort of ‘soul’, which shaped the practice of the graffitist and street artists who imagined and produced their artworks within this space.

After my imagined ‘story’, I was expecting Zosen to tell me how the history of ‘La Escocesa’ had shaped and conditioned his artworks. In contrast, he said: ‘I don’t think so. We are, as graffitists, very adaptable artists; the space only conditions our work because it is there or it isn’t. If you have more or less space you can end up developing your activity here, in the street or on a train when you have three minutes to paint…’. In the same vein Silva (1987) claims that graffiti is based on ‘spontaneous’ actions in which the graffiti makers take advantage of any time and space. They can adapt their artworks to different spaces and more importantly they are ready to find any possibility in the city at any time.

H101, who continued painting on a canvas, agreed with him: ‘The space only conditions our artworks physically. However the fact that we spend so much time in ‘La Escocesa’ and here there are so many demolished buildings around that it is good for us because we have less restrictions and we like those kinds of surfaces and spaces so as to get inspired and explore different possibilities through our artworks.’

H101 followed: ‘The material features of this landscape work harmonically with our artworks and are currently key elements to producing most of our murals in Barcelona’. Zosen highlighted the practice of graffiti outdoors with adjectives such as ‘spontaneous’, ‘free’, ‘enjoyable’ and ‘rewarding’: ‘When we paint a mural on the streets, the limits and the results are always more unpredictable and open than when we paint in the studio on a canvas or at a festival on a wooden surface’.

Taking a closer look at the particular elements that inspired Zosen to create his artworks in the city, he said: ‘I like to think about the history and the hidden stories that encircle the walls of the cities, the different architectures and its traces and layers left in the space over time…’. Using the example of the mural that he was

49 Linked to Zukin’s concept of authenticity developed in her book ‘The Naked City’ (2010) and based on the idea of ‘origins’: ‘a human right, that is cultivated by longtime residence, use and habit’ (2010:244).
painting in collaboration with Mina,\textsuperscript{50} next to ‘El Hangar’, which is another art centre close to ‘La Escocesa’, he described his creative process as follows: ‘This wall was part of a house next to the ‘Can Ricart’ building, which has been demolished but where you still can see the form of the stairs on the wall and some tiles of an old bathroom or kitchen... we have intervened in one part of the wall and the other part we have left to breathe’. These different layers or stories on the surface walls do not exist, according to Zosen, in all cities but are what he is searching for in every city that he visits. ‘Our artworks are ephemeral and we paint on surfaces, which have their own stories... we integrate and add our art-works to those stories...’. Graffiti actions, therefore, are personal inscriptions in the urban landscape shaped by individual subjectivities and the aesthetics of the city as a media device. Following Johanna Drucker (2010), I understand ‘media’ here as both a means of communication and the subject and substance of graffiti artworks. This interactive relationship between the city and the graffiti artists is negotiated, therefore, between the permanent transformation of the city and the development of each individual as a graffiti artist.

In this sense Kafre explained to me how his way of making graffiti had been transformed and adapted to different spaces, material surfaces and situations over time. He said: ‘... It is not the same when I paint on the street walls, at a graffiti festival, collaborating with someone like Nacho (H101), or painting on a canvas’. These were, according to him, different interpretations and adaptations of his visual language: ‘I don’t do the same thing when I paint a wall in an abandoned factory as when I paint a canvas; in contrast I see people that do the same letters either on canvas or on the walls in the street’. For him, this showed the creative capacity and skills of graffiti artists, which enable them to evolve, transform and reinvent their visual language. ‘I don’t understand people who paint letters on a canvas nor those who paint with very thin brushes and minimal details on a train... each situation offers different possibilities from my point of view’. He summarized his argument, saying that some graffiti artists have different visual languages, which are conditioned by the features of the space, the surface on which they paint and the context in which they are painting. Finally Kafre concluded: ‘If you paint the

\textsuperscript{50} http://cargocollective.com/minahamada
same thing using different means of communication you are not saying anything new, you are repeating yourself. The approach described by Kafre is counterintuitive and presents graffiti as a practice that is not only spontaneous but also developed in different directions.

Following on from the conservation with Kafre, we were in the studio at ‘La Escocesa’ with three more artists. Tom14 was preparing the materials that he needed (spray cans, paper to stick on the walls, brushes...) to do a job for which he had been hired that night in a club. Meanwhile Kenor, who had arrived a few minutes after we started our conversation, was writing an email in English to a possible buyer and H101 was helping him. I decided to share with them some of the case studies, ethnographic works and theoretical concepts that I was using in my research to think about the city space and the conceptions and transformations of art within different contexts. My initial idea was to compare my examples with their conceptions of graffiti and street art in Barcelona. Firstly I introduced them to the analysis by Fred Myers (2006) of different anthropological discourses in regard to Australian aboriginal acrylic paintings. In this context, I described how the production of Pintupi acrylic paintings derived from aboriginal ceremonial designs and rock paintings, associated with myths and performance of rituals. Today, I stated, they enclosed a plurality of meanings linked to cultural identity, a right of place and commodities in the art market.

I asked them if they saw any parallels between this rock painting and its processes of transformation with the graffiti and street art in Barcelona. Their answers were based more on practical aspects and on their ways of making graffiti and street art
than on the meanings that their artworks could have within their community or society. They talked about dimensions, surfaces, textures, colours, atmospheres, spaces, tools, collaborations and means of communication and how they explored those elements of their artworks either individually or by engaging in collaborative relations with other artists.

Kafre explained his experiences of when he started to paint collective murals: ‘when we painted with the ONG crew, there was a game partly motivated by me in which we tried to forget our own identities and create something new as a group. Here, it was very important to play with your own style and adapt it to the common idea. We studied the creation of the murals on the spot paying attention to everything that was happening around what we were painting. There were many variables that could play against a collective work; some of us painted with straight lines, others made circles and sometimes things did not work together’. At this point I asked Kafre if he thought that these collective murals that they made were linked to the tradition of collectivization and social movements in the city. He replied: ‘…I don’t think so, we were probably more inspired and influenced by the pioneer graffiti writers in the 1980s and 1990s who used to do collaborative murals as well. The only difference is that those pioneer graffiti artists divided the walls into sections and each of the participants painted their own section over a common background. They painted together but did not mix or change their styles. In the ONG crew that changed. There were not sections for each one of us: all of us painted on a single surface. I remember for example, when we started a figuration and someone said, I don’t know how to resolve this problem of the weight of colours. So we asked someone else. Hey! Can you do something here? I know your style and I think you can resolve it. I do it… Like this was how we tried to resolve the problems that we faced throughout the process. You started to paint with an idea and then conflicts appeared: this figure is not right; it needs to be contrasted. Here there is a lot of weight of colours and there is not so much there. But we assigned problems to each of us and resolved them together. That was one of the nice things about painting together but in a serious way.’

They also talked about the graffiti scene in the city and how it had marked their social relations and their development as individual artists. Kenor said: ‘Before
there were walls where we could paint freely and there were at least thirty people in the city who were very active in the streets and it helped to create a very vibrant scene in Barcelona that evolved everyday. The city was in permanent transformation and that inspired the graffiti and street artists to paint and think together. You always wanted to paint more and more’. Zosen also critiqued how the local council nowadays persecuted local graffiti: ‘The graffiti and street art scene does not exist in the streets anymore and the people who were part of that local movement feel pity about the situation that we are facing today’. In contrast, Zosen argued, ‘...the city is offered to the tourists who can occupy it, get drunk, be noisy and destroy the streets if they want to while the authorities keep giving penalties to the locals, who like us want to be part of the city’. In relation to this negative situation, Kafre saw something positive: ‘today the fact that we cannot freely paint in the streets makes us explore other alternatives as well’. It has also contributed to a definition of more personal styles. Kenor, for example, like other graffiti artists, has moved into new realms where his graffiti artworks include sculptures or installations and have been represented through performances and the use of video.

My methodological experiment of sharing with the participants some of the case studies that I had thought of analogies to the graffiti in Barcelona, did not lead to clear answers but rather complex relations. This made me think about the role of the ethnographers and the different ways of seeing and questioning reality. On the other hand, the answers of the participants also revealed interesting qualities about my research subject, opening up new ways of looking at it. The practice of graffiti in Barcelona enclosed a certain way of being in the city, which was exposed more than in the production of art or non-art objects, in the creation of social relations and experiences between them and with the inhabitants of the city.

I wanted also to know in more detail about how graffiti artists interacted with the space to create their works. Thus I shared with them an ethnographic study focused on the Western Apache community by the linguistic anthropologist Keith Basso (1984). In this work, Basso used the concept of ‘chronotope’ to approach the relationship between Western Apache’s stories and places. Drawing on Basso, I see graffiti artworks in public space as ‘chronotopes’ that enclose stories and memories
that make the city’s everyday ‘time take on flesh’ (Bakhtin 1981:84, as cited by Basso 1984:44-45). Like the Western Apache storytellers, I tried in this case to use the urban landscape features marked by street artworks to transmit an insight into life in Barcelona and its transformation over time. The relationship between graffiti and street artists and the features of the urban landscape were not only about telling stories through their artworks but also about making them. How did the graffiti artists keep inscribing their stories in the city when their access to the space was more restricted than ever? The traces of graffiti murals linked to what the graffiti artist ‘Pez’ described to me as the ‘golden age’ of graffiti in Barcelona have begun to be erased since the local council approved the new civic regulation that fostered a new image of the city. Maybe, as Pez put it, ‘...we are going backwards and today we are living in the bronze age of the graffiti in Barcelona’.

It could be argued that the space and its features were also tools as instrumental as the spray paint colours and brushes, which were chosen by the artists to materialize, encode and transmit meanings. As the graffiti artist H101 explained above, the material features of the buildings that form the art centre of ‘La Escocesa’ and its surroundings provided them with inspiration and spaces to develop their artworks. Trying to understand this relationship between graffiti artists and space, I asked Kafre how he selected the space to create his works? Kafre told me: ‘I don’t search for publicity through my works because that would not be very consistent with what I do... if what I do has this intimist and occultist atmosphere that I want to transmit through my works, I think that to make it very visible would go against its essence. So I prefer to see my work more in the shadow and more hidden. It is only for those who really want to see the work without imposition... I can understand the repetition of other artists all over the city but that it is not my intention’. In this scenario, the space is a key element in his artworks and as he said: ‘my works make sense and are accepted only in specific locations’.

The space and its features become part of his visual language and this is materialized through specific colours such as gold and black and the application of particular techniques such as the scratching and burning of walls. His goal, as he put it, is the creation of dark atmospheres shaped by mythological and

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supernatural creatures that can enclose secret languages, prophecies or other stories. For him, searching for locations for his interventions was very simple. He knew exactly what he needed: ‘what I need, is a wall painted with lime that I can scratch on … you don’t find these kinds of walls so easily. Either it is a wall of an abandoned house or it could be also a wall left after a building has been demolished… those are my favourite surfaces and places. This is not like most of graffiti artists, who can adapt their paintings to many other surfaces in the city… Although this limits my possibilities to paint, it also has a positive side: I know exactly what kind of wall I am searching for …’

5.6 New forms of spontaneous and anonymous graffiti

The way in which the work of Kafre had evolved had been shaped by both his own personal interests and the difficulties of painting on open walls in the city. In general terms, the transformation of graffiti in Barcelona affected the way of making graffiti restricting the spontaneity, anonymity and freedom of the artists. Thus the spontaneity of the graffiti interventions was transformed into something more planned and precise as we have appreciated in the case of Kafre. The development of more elaborate techniques also transforms the spontaneous features of graffiti actions from something occasional (Silva 1987) into something more regular. When I asked the graffiti artists if they followed through on their artworks in public space so as to transform the everyday life in the city, Kafre answered: ‘I don’t know about that because painting and being a graffiti artist has become part of our everyday life today’.

But where are the boundaries between spontaneous and non-spontaneous graffiti and how are they established? Dalakoglou (2012) suggests that the boundaries between spontaneous and non-spontaneous collective actions are blurred. He argues that the classification ‘… provides a way of ‘knowing’ spontaneously acquired knowledge’ as a way to domesticate an otherwise spontaneous world (2012:540). The question, he suggests, should be focused not only on judging whether or not an action is authentically spontaneous or not but also on what happens after the spontaneous (or not) moments of revolt (2012:541) or, in our case, after a period of unofficial graffiti interventions in public space. Zosen stated that before the civic regulation in 2006: ‘… graffiti in Barcelona was created
spontaneously and we did not need any formal authorization from the council, something that in other cities of Europe was impossible. Here graffiti did not compete with the rest of the city landscape... it was obviously linked to urban speculation and the transformation of neighbourhoods in the city centre such as ‘El Raval...’. It created, according to Zosen, many ‘no places’ such as abandoned and demolished buildings, which they used to develop their muralist skills: ‘... the people from Barcelona understood that rhythm of the city and took advantage of it’. These circumstances helped them to create their own styles and identities as street artists. This development as artists and the regulation of graffiti by the local council also changed the anonymous nature of graffiti. As Droney (2010) argues, the practice of street art ‘...overlaps between two seemingly antagonistic vocations’ (2010: 112). On the one hand, it can be subversive, representing the public image of a subculture or political collectives, while on the other hand it can work as a way of self-promotion and marketing for the graffiti artists.

I began to be aware of this tension between individual and collective identities linked to graffiti and street art in one of the first interviews that I conducted for this research. It was in 2010 when I interviewed the Brazilian graffiti artist Rodrigo Villas in the ‘Verdi’ studios in the neighbourhood of ‘Gracia’. We were talking about the graffiti and street art scene in Barcelona and Rodrigo pointed out a mural on one of the walls of the patio from which the artists accessed the different studios. Villas told me that he was working on that mural together with Boris Hoppek.\(^\text{52}\) Then he explained that Hoppek was a recognized German graffiti artist who lived in Barcelona and who, not too long ago, had sold one of his street artworks, a doll, to the ‘Opel’ car company for a global advertisement campaign. This marketization of his work conditioned his rejection by the local graffiti and street art community. I asked Rodrigo what he would do if a multinational company wanted to buy his bird (one of his street artworks). His answer was that he would not sell the one that he had made for the streets; he would make another one for the company.

The anonymity of graffiti can be approached from different points of view: in terms of the identity of the author, as a public image of a collective (Silva 1987) or as a

\(^{52}\) http://www.borishoppek.de/
signature or style of an individual (e.g. Banksy) and in regard to the relationship created between the viewer and the artwork. Generally graffiti artists act at night, on public space walls, without formal authorization and offer to share the work for free with the general public. Trying to explore how graffiti artists navigate between anonymous and public dimensions and individual identities and private aims, I talked with the graffiti artists in ‘La Escocesa’ about the art world in Barcelona in connection with graffiti. I said that the art world, as Becker (1982) claims, ‘makes art’ through the involvement of curators, collectors, artists, academics and institutions. In this sense, art, as Janet Wolff (1993) argues is not necessarily produced in isolation but is always manufactured in a social context. These social networks are not free of sensibilities towards different forms of cultural activity (Myers 2006: 507). I asked them how the art world conditioned or fostered graffiti in Barcelona? H101 told me ‘...in Barcelona there are not graffiti social networks as such. There are just a couple of galleries in the city and they don’t even have good curators to promote your work or any contact with collectors’.

During my fieldwork I saw a few street art exhibitions in the city. One of them, in the small gallery of ‘Las Dos Coronas’, featured the work of Pez, one of the graffiti artists whom I have previously mentioned in this thesis and who has a very close relationship, and collaborates, with the resident graffiti artists in ‘La Escocesa’. In general terms, Pez is a very active artist who has multiple exhibitions during the year, worldwide. In 2013 for instance, he exhibited in Oslo, Barcelona, Paris, London, Barcelona, Bratislava, Koln and Bogota. Comparing his exhibitions in Barcelona with those in other cities, Pez told me ‘...I sell much less in my city than in other cities where I exhibit my work’. In the same vein, the graffiti artists in ‘La Escocesa’ claimed that Barcelona was not where they normally sold their artworks. Each one of the artists had their own experiences. Kafre did not mention anything about selling his work, while H101 had sold a few of his artworks to a collector in Paris not too long ago and Kenor told me about his exhibition in Montana Colours, another gallery in Barcelona, where he had sold only one of his canvases.
However, on one occasion when I visited them in their studio, Kenor and H101 were collaborating on the above acrylic on canvas for Kenor’s next exhibition ‘Ritmo’, in the Artifex gallery in Antwerp, Belgium. This work, like many of Kenor’s artworks, plays with the synesthetic condition of sensory experiences, transforming sounds into colours, textures and forms, in this case inspired by the music of the group Autechre. Although there was not an established graffiti and street art market in the city there were local graffiti artists like Sixeart, who has adapted his works from the street to the gallery with great success (Schacter 2013: 306). Others like Zosen, H101 and Kenor tried to make a living out of their art by participating in street art festivals worldwide or doing private commissions and giving workshops to schools and other institutions. However, I realized that one of the key pillars in their subsistence and development, as graffiti artists, was how they collaborated with and engaged in the act of creation with their self-managed projects. In this context, the resident graffiti artists in ‘La Escocesa’ have created their own channels and space in which to create and display their works. The organization of the graffiti Festival in ‘La Escocesa’ is an example of their own way of making graffiti and street art in the city.

5.7 Mural Festival in ‘La Escocesa’
For two years the resident graffiti artists at ‘La Escocesa’ have been organizing the Festival de Muralismo de la Escocesa, “The Escocesa’s Mural Festival”. This festival is funded and supported by the ‘Barcelona council’ and ‘Creative factories’, and it is an exponent of how the graffiti and street art scene has evolved in the city. Here, there are two main elements that should be highlighted: on the one hand, the surfaces on which graffiti and street art murals exist in the city today; and on the other, the role
of the local graffiti and street artists as the main organizers, participants and curators of the festival.

The festival can be seen as one of the alternative means of producing graffiti and street art murals in the city. It offers the space and time and also the logistics for graffiti and street artists to develop their artworks on different surfaces and on a large scale. During my year of fieldwork in Barcelona I went to the first and second 'Mural Festival' organized in 'La Escocesa' in 2012 and 2013. In general terms, they presented the festival as a meeting space for national and international graffiti and street artists and as an initiative to foster reflexive thinking about graffiti and street art in the city. The duration of the festivals was five days, during which the invited artists painted their murals on the outside walls of 'La Escocesa'. They also organized live painting, the screening of documentaries, music, conferences and debates. The crowd who assisted at the 'Festivals' could move around freely within the space of 'La Escocesa', talk with some of the artists, have something to eat or drink, observe and take photographs of the outdoor murals, or see a photographic exhibition displayed in one of the rooms of the main building.

Three outdoor corridors connected to a large patio formed the space for the festival. All of this space, together with three factory buildings is part of the art centre of 'La Escocesa'. The entrance is located at the 'Pere IV' street, an irregular vertebra of the city that crosses the district of 'San Marti' located on the east side of the city up to 'La Ciutadella' in the city centre. On the most northern side of this street, 'La Escocesa' conserves its original metal shutter gate. This shutter is generally closed and it has a small door that is used by the artists and the general public to get into the art centre. On the days of the festival, however, the large door was left entirely open. Behind the door there is a corridor, approximately of 2.5 wide and 30 meters long, which ends at the large patio I mentioned above. The first five meter-stretch of the corridor is a tunnel that finishes in the open air, from where it is possible to see the different buildings of the original industrial complex. From that point, if we look back, we can see clothes hanging from the back windows and balconies of old private flats, which share a façade with 'La Escocesa'. Then on our right and left hand sides there are two more corridors, which are not
frequently transited and where there is rubble spread over the floor and some vegetation growing. If we keep walking through the central corridor, we find two main buildings, one on the right that is completely abandoned with its windows and doors blocked up with bricks, and another on the left, that is where the resident artists have their studios and where there is a communal area for exhibitions and other activities.

The murals were painted on the outside walls that form the patio, the corridors and the buildings of the former industrial complex. I walked into this scenario over its irregular floors formed by different usages of the building and comprising patches of cement and soil. My first impression was of an abandoned and old industrial complex with walls of different colours and textures. There were disused lifts, rusty pipes and electric wires visible on the walls. This is the space in which the murals appear as something between old and new, past and present and between processes of creation and destruction. There are old red bricks, cement with different layers of paint and doors and windows that suddenly take on new meanings and attention. Coming back to our walking route through ‘La Escocesa’ and walking within the main corridor we finally get to the large patio. It is here that the biggest murals are painted around a solitary, tall chimney in the middle of the patio, surrounded by rubble, vegetation, half demolished walls and bent construction irons but which probably, forty years ago, liberated the smoke of one of the factories.

Once I arrived at night while the organizers were trying to set up some spotlights in the dark backyard. Some of the artists were still working on their pieces and most
of the people were watching the film, ‘Bomb it: The global graffiti documentary’ in a small room of the main building. This documentary, filmed in 1995, addresses the history and evolution of the graffiti culture in different cities. A section of it focuses on Barcelona and some of the graffiti artists of “La Escocesa’ were interviewed for it. That same day in the morning, I met Rosh333, a graffiti artist from Alicante who was spending a couple of days in Barcelona painting and personalizing ‘Converse’ trainers in a local shop. Over lunch and with my friend Teo, Rosh333 explained to me in terms of social relations and local knowledge how complex it was to paint on good walls in cities like Barcelona. With this, he was referring to how difficult it was to find the space and time to gain visibility through elaborated artworks.

The group of artists who participated in both festivals were a mixture of recognized local and international artists such as Hello Monster from Brussels, La Mano from Barcelona, Alexa Atanaka from Toronto, Dem from Milan, Maya Hayuk from New York and many more. It could be argued that the exchange and displacement of the murals and the interactions with the artworks crossed certain boundaries between the art world and the non-art world (Ranciére 2009b: 51). The different ways of looking at the artworks and social relations in play here raised questions about whether this ‘Murals Festival’ was a way to make politics and for artists to claim their position in the public space of the city through an ephemeral conception of art or whether it was a way to commercialize and promote individual graffiti and street artists.

53 http://rosh333.tumblr.com/
In the last chapter, I will describe how the transformation of graffiti and street art in the city has nurtured collaborative and conflictive relationships between the different groups that form the heterogeneous community of graffiti and street artists in Barcelona. This complex social aspect within the graffiti community will be described alongside the involvement of the local institutions as a way to bring to a close this argument about the representation and experience of the graffiti texture of Barcelona.
Chapter 6: The Graffiti Texture in Barcelona

6.1 Introduction

In this final chapter I want to use a description of interactions between various forms of graffiti and street art in the city to explore Rancière's conception of the ‘political third’. As I have outlined already in this thesis, Rancière (2009b) proposes a broad conception of the ‘aesthetic’ in the arts focusing on the heterogeneity and sovereignty of sensory experiences and their power to cross boundaries and articulate the play between art and life. Following Rancière's (2009b) argument, I propose that in the interactions of graffiti and street art we see the crossing of borders, and changes in status and conceptions between the art world and the non-art world that can reach the ‘political third’ (2009b: 51) based on the politics of transformation of public space.

In the chapters above, my argument has been that the heterogeneity and politics of graffiti in Barcelona are stimulated by the graffiti texture of the city. I began by drawing on the sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1991) who claims that urban space is formed by a great variety of ‘whole textures’. By this he means that a texture has a meaning only for ‘...someone who lives and acts in the space... a subject with a body –or sometimes a ‘collective subject’ ‘ (1991: 132). Thus the graffiti texture of the city is a concept that sees meaning as being enclosed on walls and other surfaces with different physical properties, which create responses from the graffiti artists, the general public and ultimately from institutions. In addition, I have approached this texture as a communicative tool, in terms of its materiality and as a symbolic object or vehicle to narrate stories and life histories, which shape relations outside of the material world (Were 2010: 161).

Through my fieldwork I have identified four general forms of graffiti and street art production. These are:

- Collaborative: Graffiti and street art based on collaborations between the council and street art associations such as ‘Rebobinart’ and ‘Enrotllat’.
- Disruptive: Ways of making graffiti that contravene the council regulations (traditional graffiti).
• Antagonistic: Graffiti and street art, which is developed in connection to social and political movements.

• Commercial: Graffiti and street art with artistic and commercial pretentions, which is therefore closer to contemporary art and its market.

These different forms exist and overlap in the council’s ordering of public space alternately transgressing and respecting its regulations. The tension between different forms of graffiti though their ‘aesthetics’ enables us to think, as Ranciére (1999) proposes in relation to artworks: the productivity of contradictions between the makings and the aims of graffiti and street art in the same public space. Thus the making of graffiti and street art involves not only the skills to realise the artwork but also ideas about and ways of being in the city.

6.2 Assembling the graffiti texture

I began to produce my own graffiti ‘texture’ when I met ‘Txinorri’, a graffiti writer and street artist from ‘El Carmelo’, a neighbourhood located in the hills of Barcelona. He is an autodidact and multifaceted artist who had developed most of his works in connection with the squatter social movements in the city. Before I started my fieldwork, our common friend Nacho put me in contact with him and told me that ‘Txinorri’ directed a graffiti section (Grafforum. TV) on a Hip Hop TV programme called ‘La Tele Pum Clap’, broadcast on ‘La Tele’54, a channel based on a grassroots initiative. The graffiti section that he presented was based on news, workshops and interviews with local artists. I thought that it was a good platform from which to start my fieldwork and gain access to other people and spaces in Barcelona. So I proposed to Txinorri that I collaborate with him on the graffiti TV section by doing some filming and editing of the programme’s content. Txinorri agreed and soon after that I was assisting in their weekly assembly. This collaboration with Txinorri and ‘Grafforum’ allowed me to collaborate with other artists and collectives and to produce different visual materials, which are part of the interactive video of this thesis ‘Waking in Barcelona’.

54 http://latele.cat/en/about-us
In the first assembly I realised that ‘La Tele’ functioned through a particular ‘distribution of the sensible’ based on a self-funded and self-managed channel that worked through a system run by the members of the assembly. They worked as volunteers, producing the programmes and deciding on its contents. The assemblies were our own ‘public sphere’ where every participant in ‘La Tele’ could participate with his or her input based on a system of equality. This was a common mechanism in many of the collectives and associations that I knew in the city such as ‘La Casa de la Montaña’ and ‘El Ateneo Libertario’ in Vallcarca. In ‘La Tele’ for instance, each programme had its own weekly assembly. Generally, this assembly mechanism was open to collaborations and interactions with members of different collectives, who shared similar ideologies, friends and tastes, as well as spaces where they lived or spent their spare time. The tradition of the assemblies in the city can be traced back to the libertarian anarchist movements and their influence on the organization of the working class in Barcelona. Moreover, the assembly system was also adopted by clandestine political groups and grassroots movements such as neighbourhood associations during the last years of Franco’s dictatorship (McNeill 1999:120).

My collaboration with the ‘La Tele Pum Clap’ programme and my participation in its assemblies allowed me to be part of its social network and get in contact with other collectives and graffiti artists from different parts of the city. From there, I participated in different projects, which became important sources of data for this research, such as my collaboration in the mural painted on the squatted building of ‘La Carboneria’. Most of the people whom I met in connection with ‘La Tele’ already
knew each other or participated in similar projects. Within this 'distribution of the sensible', graffiti artists used graffiti and street art to create political statements and as a source of communication for different political and social collectives in the city. The spaces where they used to make their artworks were also quite specific and linked to squatted buildings and walls freed and managed by local collectives and associations.

The fact that members of the assemblies of ‘La Tele Pum Clap' and similar collectives were considered as anti-capitalist groups made them aware of the possibility of being infiltrated by authorities. Although, our common friend Nacho had introduced me to Txinorri, after a few months a member of the assembly became suspicious of me, thinking that I was an undercover policeman who was spying on them. The reason for his suspicion was linked to the fact that I always carried a sound recorder with me, the one that I used for my interviews. I was labelled as other anthropologists have been a spy, who had gone undercover into a group to learn about their secret information, strategies and aims. Thus new people, ideas and speculations constantly shaped the nature of the social ties that constitute these groups and their social networks.

My own experience in ‘La Tele’ made me think about how its social network was built on strong rules regarding the exclusion and distrust of outsiders. But how are these rules of exclusion established within the graffiti groups? Most of the graffiti and street artists that I met knew each other and sometimes painted together. This shows that the rules of inclusion and exclusion were not only based on trust but also on similar sensibilities and ways of interacting with the material surfaces of the city.

Graffiti and street art images are not only localized within particular and isolated social networks, they are also embedded in materials and bodies in motion. In the project “Making the Street” (Chapter Three), I embodied the practice of street art in the city of Barcelona, pasting photographs on its walls. I also engaged in dialogues about graffiti in Barcelona with members of the collective of street artists in ‘La Escocesa’ (Chapter Five) art centre and participated as an observer in the mural festivals organized by them. I then collaborated with a collective of graffiti artists in
the creation of a mural in the squatted building of ‘La Carboneria’, making images of the whole process (Chapter Four). In this last chapter, I am going to describe the role of street art associations in the graffiti scene of the city and their relationships with other forms of graffiti production. Within the projects organized by street art associations I observed conflicting and collaborative relationships between artists, associations, the general public and the local council. But how can the same wall elicit antagonic or collaborative responses from different people? To answer this question, I am going to describe through the following examples how the graffiti texture of the city is a lived entity based on relations in the social world, as well as being about material surfaces (Were 2010).

6.3 The street art associations and the council

The graffiti created in connection with collaborations between street art associations and the council implied the negotiation of formal permits to paint graffiti on surfaces in the public space. The applications for these authorizations were managed and driven by a new participant within the process of graffiti production in the city, street art associations and art platforms such as Rebobinart55, Enrotllat56 and Difusor57. These associations were inhabitants’ initiatives, which appeared as an answer to the new civic regulation of 2006 and its zero tolerance graffiti policy. In this new scenario, the art associations started to work as a bridge between the graffiti artists and the council institutions to legally find and manage walls in the public space for the practice of graffiti and street art. Although these authorized interventions involved a wide spectrum of local graffiti and street artists, the individuals in charge of the management of the street art associations generally came from other fields such as architecture, computer sciences or advertising.

‘Rebobinart’ is institutionally the most important graffiti and street art association in Barcelona. Its founders were pioneers in proposing possible alternatives to the graffiti in the city after the council’s regulation of 2006, which states the creators of unauthorized graffiti will be prosecuted and sanctioned by the local council. The

55 http://rebobinart.com/
56 http://enrotllat.wordpress.com/
57 http://www.difusor.org/es/tag/graffiti/
first of their projects, called *Persianes Lliures*, “free shutters”, included a web platform that put into contact graffiti artists and business owners who wanted their business shutters painted. The business owners only had to pay for the materials. At that time, the painting of business shutters was also a source of economic income for some graffiti artists in the city but the platform offered the same service to the business owners free of charge. This caused discontent in the local graffiti community and disagreement towards this street art association and its initiative. Eventually the local council also began to control the painting of the shutters to make them fit with the colours of the building façade. This antagonistic situation did not discourage the founders and members of *Persianes Lliures*. Although their first project was not very successful they went on to create a new one. This new project was the *Murs-Lliures* “free walls” web and the street art association ‘Rebobinart’. Their main goal was to ‘free’ and manage walls in the city for the practice of graffiti and street art. This time they got in contact with the council’s department of ‘Paistage Urba’, and proposed to them that they organize pedagogic and social projects using graffiti and street art. Today Rebobinart collaborates with the council and has a position within the local institutional network. For instance, on the day of ‘La Mercé’ – the annual festival of the city of Barcelona-, they have their own stand in the ‘Plaza de Cataluña’ (Catalan square) alongside other relevant local associations for the council.

Overall, ‘Rebobinart’ is the street art platform of the city that has more visibility and connections at an institutional level. However, I would not say the same about its influence, integration and connections within the local graffiti and street community. Although I always observed a high level of involvement in the collaborations between the graffiti artists and the managers of ‘Rebobinart’, I also heard many criticisms of them and saw limited support for their projects from part of the graffiti community. For instance, their presentation and roundtable at the ‘Hipnotic’ hip-hop festival was almost cancelled because there was no audience and when it finally took place it only involved four graffiti artists, the manager of ‘Rebobinart’, a journalist and me. Then, at their stand in the annual festival city of ‘La Mercè’, I saw Marc almost single-handedly trying to organize a workshop for kids and arguing with a graffiti artist who wanted to paint something that was
inappropriate from his point of view (the face of Esther Quintana who had lost one of her eyes that year due to a police rubber ball shot in a local demonstration) and with other artists who had painted a large monkey face on the floor of the square instead of the wood surfaces provided.

The key point of disagreement between the collective of graffiti and street artists and the local council has been the lack of communication and understanding between both parties. Throughout my fieldwork I tried to get the perspectives of both sides in order to use them later as a tool to open debates with the different participants in this research. The interview with the director of Paisatge Urba “Urban Landscape”, Xavier Olivella, was arranged quickly and in order to conduct it I went to the offices of the department in the ‘Edifici Colón’, the first skyscraper built in Barcelona in 1970. Xavier Olivella defined what they understood as ‘Urban Landscape’ and the main goals of his department: ‘urban landscape is everything that it can be perceived from the public space; not only what we find in the public space but everything that we can perceive and all those elements that affect that perception is what we understand as ‘Urban Landscape’. In this context, he highlighted the role of architecture in the urban landscape as one of the main tourist attractions and how they had try to protect and conserve this resource of the city through their regulations and interventions. I asked about the relationship between the department of ‘Paisatge Urba’ and the collective of graffiti and street artists in the city, to which he replied: ‘we have tried to talk with members of the

http://elpais.com/m/elpais/2014/05/09/inenglish/1399653275_244898.html
graffiti and street art community but their view about the city is very particular and different to ours... there is always an element of rebellion in what they do and it is very difficult to connect and agree in something with them’. Thus the collaborations that they had with street art associations, such as ‘Enrotllat’ and ‘Rebobinart’, had also fostered antagonistic relations between the different participants involved in graffiti and street art.

Marc, the main founder of ‘Rebobinart’, has a background in advertising and computer science, which he has applied to the design of the web platform ‘Murs Lliures’: ‘the platform is a very simple tool, there are many artists registered and more or less they keep uploading their photographs. This tool allows for the artist to see the location of the free walls in the city and it also allows them to apply for a permit to paint them. As part of the permit they get a civil liability insurance that covers their activity. It was what the council demanded that we provide because they did not want to be responsible for anything that could happen to the artists’. The ‘Murs Lliures’ web has become the only channel through which graffiti artists can paint the free or legal walls of the city but this process of painting has not been accepted by part of the community of graffiti artists. Marc explained to me that another aim of the platform was to record data through the tool that they had created: ‘The idea of the web is to record the history of the walls. Here we would have a register of all the people who have painted on those walls. In this sense, I am not so much interested in their personal details but I am interested in the regularity in which the walls are painted, the age of the people who paint, the months of the year in which the artists paint, which are the months in which the artist paint more...for example this month of august we have received two hundred applications so we know that the walls were painted two hundred times through the data collected in the platform...’. In this sense, the graffiti texture of these walls, and their surfaces, has been also transformed into a collection of applications, numbers, names and statistics.

Many of the graffiti artists, in contrast, did not understand why they had to apply for a permit and give their personal details to paint on some walls that they had previously painted without following this process. This new situation has not only transformed the way in which they can approach the walls so as to paint them
spontaneously, anonymously and without authorization, but it also implies a loss of their freedom of movement and their capacity to make decisions about places with symbolic meanings for them. Today the free walls are controlled and managed by ‘Rebobinart’ and the council and this fact is understood by some of the graffiti artists as an appropriation of their walls by people who are not even part of the graffiti and street art community. It has established divisions within the graffiti community, conflicts between different sides and boycotts or non-recognition of the norms and processes established by ‘Rebobinart’ and the council.

These examples show a separation between different ways of understanding and making graffiti within the same space and shared events. Thus, in the graffiti world of Barcelona, ‘the distribution of the sensible’, or what Rancière (2004) defines as an order shaped by what is visible or invisible, thinkable or unthinkable and doable or undoable, exists in an anarchic and permanent flux; it is discussed, shared and criticized at a social level, and visualized, transgressed and performed at the sensorial and material levels.

In this regard most of the street artists that I interviewed thought that the council and even the street art associations had taken advantage of them. The only free walls in the city where painting was permitted were ones that were not administrated and controlled by them.

One of the spaces that they referred to enclosed one of the most emblematic ‘walls of fame’ in the city, formed by three walls in the middle of a square. The walls are in the square of the ‘Tres Xemeneies’ in the neighbourhood of ‘Poble Sec’ and are managed by the street art association ‘Rebobinart’. The square is an example of Barcelona’s industrial architecture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There stands the Tres Xemeneies, “Three Chimneys”, which were once part of the electricity power plant ‘Light and Power Company’, which was known locally as the ‘Canadiense’. This is a place that is also remembered for the strikes organized by the Power Company’s workers in 1919, which were a milestone in the history of the Catalan workers movement. As a meeting place for different collectives in the city, the square is not only used by graffiti artists but also by skaters and as a venue for various music-art festivals throughout the year. The
three walls are the subject of conflict and discussion between the different participants involved in the practice of graffiti today.

6.4 Traditional graffiti: Another layer of the graffiti texture
The graffiti texture of these walls and other walls of the city is like a 'living tissue' formed by a spatial web of images, social networks and individual experiences but which is in constant flux. Another example of the diversity of this texture is linked to what could be called 'traditional graffiti’, because it is spontaneous, anonymous and without authorization. The following section is based on my meeting with the graffiti artist Tate and it illustrates how the graffiti texture is felt on the surfaces of the streets and their walls and how it is also found underground on the surfaces of the public transport trains.

One afternoon, under a stormy sky in Barcelona, I met Tate, an experienced graffiti writer. We sat in a terrace bar of the George Orwell Square, located in ‘El Gòtic’ neighbourhood in the central district of the city. Here, we chatted and had some drinks for more than two hours. At some point in our conversation, I asked him about the graffiti scene of the city. In almost wartime terms and using words and expressions such as ‘expeditions’, ‘attacks’, ‘fights’ and ‘heavy damages’, he explained to me how lately they had been very active in getting into the train sheds to paint whole train carriages. ‘We even have the proper keys to get into the sheds, someone stole them from a train driver and now we can have access to the same places as they do. Afterwards we just paint the CCTV cameras and have a few weeks to paint freely until they clean them again’. I asked him why the cameras remained painted for so long before being cleaned and his response was that with the economic cuts they did not even have people to do this. According to Tate, even the controversial civic ordinance from 2006, which implied the control and punishment of many activities in the public space such as graffiti, cannot be fully applied. He also told me about his crew, which is made up of old-timers like him and younger graffiti writers, most of whom are from his neighbourhood Hospitalet, although he also knew graffiti writers from all over the city. Through the description of his crew, Tate transmitted a feeling of something between a

59 The 'living tissue' metaphor is taken from Tom Mitchell’s conception of the world of images, as an organic body structured by the logic of a lack of life and a proliferating virus (Mitchell in Rancière 2009a: 126)
community and a gang, in which its members enjoy being together and the rush of transgressing rules.

The community he described was built upon a merging of collaborations in their painting actions and confrontations with the security people working on the public transport system. They had a particular relation with the security people, whom he called lobos, “wolfs”. They greeted each other under normal circumstances, such as when they walked in the streets or when they used the public transport system as ordinary users, but when they met in the train sheds they fought and ran. The ‘distribution of the sensible’ of this space was transformed into a war game between the graffiti writers and the security people. Here, the politics of representation, as Rancière (2004) argues, was reduced to power (2004:28). The security people have the power to be able to see what is happening in the train shed through CCTV cameras and the power of the graffiti artists is to eliminate those cameras and avoid being seen. The one who has more power in these terms ends up winning the battle for representation. Thus the space of the train sheds and how they are accessed or not is the key to transgressing a certain ‘distribution of the sensible’. Finally, Tate proudly recommended to me a video on the internet, which contains some of their latest actions in the train sheds of Barcelona: Furia de Titanes60, “Rage of Titans”. Later that night I arrived home and watched the video and I could see how their actions and confrontations with the public transport security were real and tougher than I had imagined.

60 http://youtu.be/s5xHERAEPtw
In another of our meetings, Tate invited me to a hip-hop festival in 'La Bascula,\(^{61}\) a civic centre located close to his neighbourhood in 'L'Hospitalet' in the southwest of Barcelona. As part of the festival, in which there were people break dancing, rapping and mixing hip-hop music, the graffiti artists of the area were invited to paint on the outdoor gardens of the main building. There were many graffiti artists and the organizers of the event provided each of them with a wood panel surface, a box of spray bottles with six different colours and a sandwich. They could paint graffiti freely, adapting what they used to do in different contexts and on surfaces such as the walls in the street, or the trains in the city sheds, to a square wood surface approximately one and a half metres in length. Here the mood and attitude of the graffiti artists were different to those communicated through the video 'Rage of Titans', which I mentioned above. The video transmitted action, excitement and danger and it positioned the action of painting as less important than the whole adventure that surrounded it. In the event, in contrast, everyone was calm and concentrated on painting his or her letters, signs or figures. People moved around the outdoor garden looking at the different artworks and sharing their impressions of them. I got the feeling that most of them knew each other and although they made some comments about the artworks that they were making, I realised that they mainly spoke about everyday issues such as their jobs and families or what their future plans were. After a couple of hours, everyone had painted their wood panels and they left them in the garden, leaning on the various trees, fences and walls that surrounded the civic centre. I asked Tate what they would do with the paintings and he told me that the organizers might keep some for decoration but that most of them would be dumped.

The nonchalance and apparent disregard towards their artworks within an organized and institutionalized context changed when they referred to their artworks in the public space of the city. To explain this different attitude towards their artworks in the public space, I am going to describe a particular case in which three different forms of graffiti production came together on the same wall. This will help us to get an insight into the social relations between the participants in

\(^{61}\)http://www.labascula.cat/
different forms of graffiti production and how they are shaped by different relationships with the surface of the wall.

6.4.1 Is it only a Wall?

The location where these three different attitudes towards graffiti and street art and the space came together was in ‘Balmes’ street, one of the most important avenues in Barcelona’s Eixample. The different participant involved were Zosen and Mina, two internationally recognized graffiti artists who were resident artists in the art centre of ‘La Escocesa’, a local architect called Jordi, who was also the founder and manager of the street art association ‘Enrotllat’, and a crew of graffiti artists who made ‘traditional graffiti’ such as ‘tags’ and ‘throw ups’ and were very active in the city centre. All of them converged on the fence wall that surrounded a building site where a big hotel was being constructed. Fences around building sites are one of the preferred surfaces in the city on which graffiti artists create their works. The members of the crew of graffiti artists were the first to target the fence wall. They had painted ‘tags’ (small signatures) and throw ups (big signatures or crew letters) on it without a permit, covering the whole surface of the wall, which was approximately two metres wide and twenty-five metres long.

Then Jordi, the founder and manager of the street art platform ‘Enrotllat’, proposed to the construction company and the council department of ‘Paisatge Urbano’ that they paint the fence walls and transform them into a street art mural. After the proposal had been sent to the council and several meetings had taken place with
representatives of the council and the building company, ‘Enrotllat’ obtained a formal permit to paint the fence wall. Jordi suggested to Zosen and Mina that they paint the wall and they accepted his offer. Before that, however, Zosen had to speak with the graffiti artists who had previously painted the wall and they gave them authorization to paint over their graffiti with the new mural. According to Jordi, the first graffiti had been on the wall for more than one year and this made it easier to get their permission. Nevertheless, there was some kind of misunderstanding and after Zosen and Mina had painted the new mural it was defaced and crossed out with some sprayed letters in Catalan language that said: ‘This is also graffiti and not stepping (crossing) on the Hall of Fame’.

This meant that Zosen had to speak with them again and arrive at an agreement. Finally everything was settled. Zosen and Mina fixed the mural and the other graffiti artists did not intervene, leaving the mural alone until the construction of the hotel was finished. This example shows how different forms of graffiti overlap with each other and how they foster different modes of participation in public space and express different attitudes towards graffiti and street art. These overlaps on the same surface of the public space, make as we have seen, the forms of graffiti ephemeral and sometimes unpredictable. Thus this mural enclosed different layers of relations, not only between the different artists and between the artists and the surface of the wall, but also with the council, the building company and the street art association ‘Enrotllat’. This situation allows us to think of the mural as a form of ‘relational art’ based on, as Bourriaud (1997) claims regarding this form of art, inter-subjective encounters (Bourriaud in Bishop 2004: 53). In the graffiti world, however, the relations produced by these inter-subjective encounters are not always harmonious and can result in exclusions and antagonistic reactions linked to opposed interests or simply misunderstandings. But are there any boundaries between the harmonious and antagonistic relations in the production of graffiti or are they freely crossed and constantly reshaped?
6.5 ‘Enrotllat’: between the architecture and the street art

As I have previously mentioned in this thesis, the constitution of street art associations, collectives and platforms was an initiative to find alternative channels for the practice of graffiti and street art after the civic regulation of 2006. This new regulation encouraged the prosecution of unauthorized graffiti and street art and limited the creation of more elaborate murals, localizing this kind of artwork to particular walls and elements of the urban landscape such as the steel shutters used to secure business premises. It triggered new forms of graffiti production in which proposals and extensions of projects were necessary to obtain formal permissions from the local institution of Paisatge Urba. Within this new process of graffiti production the role of street art associations has become a key element in the organization of events, applications for formal authorizations and interactions between graffiti artists and the local council. This has resulted in alternative forms of graffiti creation in which the street art associations play a key role.

‘Enrotllat’ is an example of this that advocates new ways of producing graffiti and street art in the city. Its founder is Jordi, an architect who has applied his interest in urbanism and street art to projects based on collaborations between artists, business owners, construction companies and institutions. According to Jordi, the constitution of ‘Enrotllat’ was connected to his academic background in architecture and personal interest in what, in the architecture field, are called ‘residual’ elements of the urban landscape. He told me that examples of ‘residual’ elements are business shutters, the fences and walls of building sites and the dividing walls between buildings, which in Spain are called medianeras. Jordi said:
‘... all these elements are involuntarily created by architects but end up affecting the image of the urban landscape, the ground floors of the streets, for instance, become closed spaces when businesses close their shutters and stop exhibiting their products and then it affects the dimensions of the street, which loses its depth.... At the same time, these elements become targets for graffiti and street art intervention ...’. Jordi labelled all of these counter activities as ‘rebellious art’ and stated that the aim of ‘Enrotllat’ was to channel all of this energy and structure it through the organization of events that foster artistic intervention in specific spatiotemporal contexts.

Looking at this from a multi-perspective approach and using, as an example, the last event organized by ‘Enrotllat’ in the neighbourhood of ‘Gracia’, I argued and Jordi agreed with me, that the event enclosed two main aspects: on the one hand, the transformation of the market building through artistic means, and on the other, the social aspect of the event and the fostering of social interactions at different levels. Jordi defined this intervention according to a new strategy within the graffiti world in the city, which he called artistica-social “social-artistic”. He described it in the following terms: ‘... we created different social synergies between the people from the market (business owners and workers), the council and the artists; then the day of the intervention, it created links with everybody who was passing by from the neighbours to the tourists, all of them were attracted to what the artists were doing, it was a kind of small performance, an outdoor studio activity and it ended up creating links between the artistic activity and the society or the persons who inhabit the urban environment’.

This relationship between the graffiti artists and the inhabitants of Barcelona through an art intervention like this can enable us to think again about it in terms of ‘relational’ or ‘dialogic’ art. With regard to this form of relational or collaborative art, as I have mentioned before, there is a relevant debate between two opposite positions: one of them highlights the communicative and social aspect of the art interventions, while the other prioritizes the ‘shock’ of art and its antagonism as aesthetics value. In this sense, Grant Kester (2011) argues that a socially collaborative art project is successful if it works at the level of social intervention even though it is based on art (Kester in Bishop 2006:181). Therefore, the form of
art defended by Kester is based on the ‘relational aesthetic’ in meetings, events and diverse types of collaborations between people and artists. Claire Bishop (2006), in contrast, situates Kester’s position within an intellectual trend based on ‘identity politics’ and marked by an inflexible mode of political correctness. As such, Bishop states, ‘... it also constitutes a rejection of any art that might offend or trouble its audience’ (2006:181).

Where can we situate the event organized by ‘Enrotlat’? Certainly the aim of the event was to project a different image of graffiti and street art and create relations and friendly dialogues with the inhabitants of the city. As Jordi claimed, during the event, the graffiti and street artists projected a collaborative and positive image of themselves by being closer to the audience and transforming the negative public views of themselves as graffiti artists. Were these ‘politics of graffiti’ framed within Rancière’s (2004) conception of an ‘aesthetic regime’ in which he identifies art ‘... within the singular and frees it from any specific rule’? (2004:23).

From the point of view of some of the graffiti artists, the event was structured according to rigid principles of participation and modes of intervention. Thus the intervention was focused only on the metal shutters of the market building with the same sizes and background black colour. Most of these shutters were small and were offered to single artists. They offered four collaborative interventions focused on the four larger shutters of the main entrances to the market. In addition, each of the artists had to represent a letter of the alphabet with their works, something that was avoided by many of them. But could we really conceive of the whole event
as a collective and ‘collaborative or relational’ art intervention? It fostered a creation of synergies between different collectives such as the market workers, the council institution, the people of ‘Enrotllat’ and the artists. A local company ‘Montana Colors’, which is an internationally recognized local manufacturer of spray colours, supported the project and offered the artists all of the material that they needed for their interventions. In addition, it became an attraction for tourists and a way of interacting with the inhabitants of the neighbourhood. Jordi also made special reference to the interaction with children and how this kind of event could have pedagogic benefits for them. There was a high level of participation and the graffiti artists enjoyed the opportunity to paint in the public space of the city. The event brought together seventy-four graffiti artists from the city, fostering meetings between old friends, who shared time and exchanged experiences. The social and collaborative aspects of the event became the main engines of the whole artistic intervention.

Nevertheless, what seemed to be a collective intervention was also very individual. Jordi explained to me: ‘... what we did was a group intervention but based on individualities... besides there were prizes and everyone did their best to win...’. Therefore, what Kester (2011) calls ‘dialogic’ or ‘relational’ art, as a form of art that produces knowledge, discursive relationships, experiences and the transgression of existing categories of thought between artists and their audience, can also produce diverse interpretations. Taking a more critical approach to the event organized by ‘Enrotllat’, it imposed the conditions – primary colour, background colour and dimension of the surface, time and place- on the graffiti artists constraining and denying them the freedom to choose and transform the public space of the city. This limited the possibility of the graffiti artists engaging in a creative and critical interaction with the public space and their audience. The event also reaffirmed the council’s graffiti policy by following its procedures and legal conditions and fostered a form of graffiti and street art production based on its control and institutionalization. In short, we could say that the event was planned and produced within specific conditions to function as a tourist attraction, a tool of

62 http://www.montanacolors.com/webapp/
collaboration and interaction between the inhabitants and the graffiti artists, and in addition as a way to clean and create a visually ordered image of the city. Thus the graffiti interventions of this event reaffirmed the political ordering of the city without questioning it.

In this sense, I obtained a variety of different views from the collective of artists. Most of the graffiti artists were very critical of the local council and its graffiti policies, which determined ways of being and making in the public space. Zosen claimed that the graffiti artists felt excluded from the public space and summarized their relationship with the council as antagonistic: ‘The city council doesn’t know how to listen its inhabitants and now everything is full of hypocrisy… This week the council is hosting the ‘XGames’ in ‘Montjuic’ and we (Zosen and Kenor) went there to paint a few skate ramps… So the city is promoting what precisely it is prohibiting in its public space. It is unbelievable…’. Another point of disagreement and frustration for the graffiti artists was based on the fact that the council, and art associations such as ‘Enrotllat’, had taken advantage of them. Some of the artists felt that they had lost their strength on the streets and that they could only express themselves where and when they were told. In terms of the graffiti texture of the city, in cases like this we can observe its capacity for mutation. The same surface stimulated the mind, the body and the senses in quite different ways for the manager of ‘Enrotllat’, the graffiti artists, the council and the general public.

The graffiti artist, Roc, explained to me the danger of this new situation in the city for graffiti artists who did not fit within the features that the council proposed. The
concern was that this could foster elitism among graffiti artists while the criminalization of young people who had the curiosity to express themselves in public space continued. Ramon said: ‘we have become part and parcel of the council’s game of bureaucratizing everything’. Thus, if the graffiti artists play the council’s game they have to respect the ‘aesthetics’ of the city’s public space and paint only on certain surfaces and during certain periods of time. This means that there is not a situation of equality to build a common project between different views of the public space. But maybe the potential framework through which to look at this ‘collaborative’ and ‘relational’ graffiti intervention is not in these particular cases but crossing the boundaries of their site to explore the positions and views of their participants within different sites.

6.6 Militant Graffiti
Roc BlackBlock was one of the graffiti artists I met while painting the mural in ‘La Carboneria’ and afterwards I met him again several times painting at other events and surfaces such as the squatted building of ‘La Casa de la Montaña’ and other walls managed by the cultural association ‘Antic Forn de Vallcarca63’, and street art associations such as ‘Enrotllat’. I interviewed him once and I asked him about the surfaces where he used to paint: ‘…I was always involved and participated in social centres (squatted buildings) of the city… the space where I began to paint was in ‘La Hamsa’, a squatted factory where I was living for a few years. ‘La Hamsa’ was a factory that had long walls that you could paint… It was the ‘social centre’, which facilitated the means to paint, not only the walls but also the materials. In return, I collaborated by giving colour and dignifying the space and at the same time representing and transmitting the principles on which the ‘social centre’ was grounded’. Generally the ‘social centres’ in Barcelona are squatted buildings based on autonomous and self-managed spaces, which lie outside the influence of capitalism and ‘…in which people are brought together to share informal knowledge, creativity and culture’ (Vilaseca 2103: 4).

Then I asked Roc if he thought that what he had painted was political graffiti and he responded to me: ‘I think that politics is about how a society is organized and

63 http://anticformdevallcarca.blogspot.co.uk/
according to which values, and principles, and I think that everybody in an active or passive way is leaving a message... I don’t make any political campaign for anyone through my graffiti works and therefore I think that graffiti is not a way of making politics in the same way that the system does and understands it... Graffiti is a means of communication and in some cases when some of us form part of certain collectives, we offer that means of communication to the collective... Like the last mural that I did for the collective, Unitat contra el Feixisme i el Racisme⁶⁴ “Unity against fascism and racism”, in that case I was the communicator for the whole collective’.

Roc proposed to the collective his idea for a mural, based on the painting of a photograph of two militia women who fought in the Spanish civil war against fascism, alongside the phrase in Catalan language, Feixisme mai mes, “Fascism never again”. The collective approved his proposal in an assembly. They got permits from the council and provided the materials for the mural. This reflects a system based on the political value of equality and the autonomy of each of the assembly members. The mural was painted on a wall in the market square in ‘El Clot’ neighborhood on the northern side of Barcelona and it was part of a campaign against the social centre of ‘La Casa de la Tramontana’ which promoted fascists and Nazi ideologies among the adolescents of the neighborhood. This circumstance provoked the sabotage of the mural several times by people who disagreed with the political statement represented on the wall of the square. On one of these occasions, the saboteurs painted red clown noses, on the faces of the two-militia women. Roc tried to fix them and repainted them twice but finally he decided to

⁶⁴ http://unitatcontraelfeixisme.org/
leave it alone in order to make people think about what had been done. The council closed ‘La Casa de la Tramontana’ social centre in June 2014 because it did not fulfil some of the local regulations. Before that, more than sixty collectives in the city had signed a manifesto against the centre and its activities, which, according to them, promoted fascistic ideologies and were seen as potentially fostering violence among the inhabitants of the neighbourhood.

I want to use this mural to make my final reflections on the graffiti in Barcelona and ask again the question that W.J.T Mitchell (1996) posed in his landmark work: ‘What do pictures want?’ Probably the most obvious answer in this case, according to the individuals that sabotaged the mural, was that the images in this case wanted to be manipulated and ridiculed as living objects. This kind of action could be compared with similar ones developed during the last years of Franco’s dictatorship, in which graffiti was used not only as a weapon to make political claims against the dictatorship but also as a tool of repression, for example when Franco’s supporters crossed out graffiti on the walls and used graffiti to legitimize the dictatorship regime (Sempere 1977: 52). The people, who sabotaged the mural painted by Roc, understood the mural not only as something offensive to them but also as a tool for communication in public space. The world of graffiti images is, as Mitchell states about the world of images, a ‘living tissue’, which needs us in order to be alive (Mitchell in Rancière 2009a: 126). Denouncing the power of images or denying that power comes down to the same thing: the two actions express for Mitchell the same anxiety in the face of the power of images, the same recognition of that power. Thus the practice of graffiti can be seen as an active political ‘militancy’ in support of ideas, collectives, crews and street art associations which ends up inscribed on material surfaces and expressed in public space. In this sense, the ‘political third’ of graffiti and street art, is the politics developed between different worlds such as the graffiti and the council or the graffiti and the world of art and shaped by collaborations, disruption, antagonism and the market. Looking at different ways of producing graffiti in Barcelona, I have investigated the rationality of these images and the different positions of graffiti artists in the city. As Mitchell (2005) states, the idea is to take pictures less transparent and turn their analysis from multiple perspectives.
Conclusion

The graffiti texture in Barcelona is a complex web of social networks in which images, ideas and bodies are imbricated in a system of communication in public space. Using Bakhtin’s idea of ‘the chronotope’ I have seen graffiti in the public space of Barcelona as a way to produce stories in which the everyday life in the city was materialized through collaborations, dialogues and interventions. Here the surfaces of the city stimulate both the graffiti interventions and the restrictions and regulations of them by the local council and other institutions. Throughout my fieldwork I experienced how the physical properties and symbolic values of the material surfaces in the city activated a diversity of relations. I have argued that the different forms of graffiti in Barcelona are embedded in the constant flux of everyday life in public space. This situation made me approach graffiti and street art as a mutable phenomenon based on ideas and lived experiences. Thus my ethnographic work has been focused on ‘the small hidden islands of freedom’ (Arendt 1968) where graffiti was made to explore the political role of space in the ‘public sphere’ of the city as a site for alternative conceptualizations of ‘the public’. It enabled me to reflect on the urban transformations of the city throughout its history and how they were shaped by the tension between dominant and subaltern or resistance relationships expressed in public space.

I have followed and applied Rancière’s (2009b) broad notion of ‘aesthetics’ in my research using his study of critical art. He argues that ‘aesthetics encloses not only perceptive qualities but also practices and performances, production of places and fostering of social and political relations’ (Rancière 2004:10). In this sense, I have claimed that the ‘aesthetics’ of public space functions as a camouflage to cover and homogenize the diversity of the population in the city. The practice of graffiti and street art can transgress that sensible order through different ways of moving, seeing and doing in public space but can also reaffirm the political ordering of the city without questioning. The recent history of graffiti in Barcelona shows how graffiti images have moved from being permitted as part of the public space to being excluded, prosecuted and regulated after the civil regulation of 2006. Thus I have approached graffiti as ‘corporeal images’, which carries the imprint of bodies and the way in which those bodies mediate with the world (MacDougall 2006). This
position implied multiple embodiments based on my relationship with the graffiti images and with the people who were involved in the making of these images. Therefore my representation of the graffiti world in Barcelona was based on a compound of ideas, bodies and materials in motion and how they are related with each other. Within this entangle there was a struggle over representation in which graffiti acted as an interface between ways of seeing and ways of acting politically in the city. In short, I saw the graffiti and street art in Barcelona as a mutable and adaptable energy, which found on the surfaces of the city its ways for being visible and invisible, heard and unheard and legitimized and un-legitimized as part of different political processes. The graffiti texture in Barcelona contains a certain ‘distribution of the sensible’ based on how the material surfaces can shape the way in which graffiti is made and at the same time be transformed by graffiti artists, the local council and the general public and the relationships between them. These ideas inspired the creation of the interactive video ‘Walking in Barcelona’ as a way to represent the changeable natures of the city navigating between the different visual materials that I produced throughout my fieldwork.
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