

Graffiti and the perceived injustice: The relational texture of Barcelona's public space

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Abstract

In this article, I approach graffiti as a relational entity across social and power dynamics in Barcelona. Taking a broad understanding of graffiti beyond its material dimension, I examine what graffiti does and what it becomes in the public space of the city. In this context, I see public space as an interface of political meanings and perceived injustice between the city's inhabitants. This allows me to address graffiti as a heterogenous movement, which stimulates protest practices across shared spaces and times. To access this entanglement of relations, I propose the concept of "graffiti texture" as a way to explore the relationships between sensory and symbolic orders in the city. This texture is not only created by material surfaces or substances but is also permeated by a plurality of social networks shaped by multiple ways of making and seeing the city. Drawing on my ethnographic material from Barcelona, I engage in "multi-temporal" analogies between graffiti produced in the city and events linked to the Spanish civil war, gender relations, and protests. The connections between them will be used as active sources of analytical thought and story making to search for unlikely connections between graffiti and the transformation of human perception across times. Moreover, to support and contrast my argument, I incorporate the voices of graffiti artists and other actors from my ethnographic research in Barcelona.

KEYWORDS: graffiti, texture, image, relation, Barcelona

Introduction

The right to the city suggests a broad scenario shaped by present, past, and future relations. I place in this scenario, across times, some of my ethnographic material collected in Barcelona over recent years. This will help me to connect graffiti with issues of protest, power dynamics and gender relations. In 2013, as part of my doctoral research in Social Anthropology with Visual Media at the University of Manchester, I entered into my fieldwork knowing that the graffiti images were part of the ephemeral and changeable street life of the city and could be covered by other graffiti works or erased by the local council. During the first stages of my research on Barcelona's graffiti, I started to be absorbed into what happened with the erased graffiti images. Could it be that the old graffiti lived on as part of the material surfaces of the city? In this way, graffiti can be seen as part of the city's encrypted relations and stories over time. Taking seriously the material surfaces (Ingold, 2013) of the city becomes a way of exploring some unforgotten and hidden stories linked to graffiti and social conflicts.

This special issue of the *Anthropological Notebooks* journal, on the culture of protest against perceived injustices, is an opportunity to react to my ethnographic work on graffiti, searching for untold and invisible stories related to graffiti and the culture of protest in the city of Barcelona. I have transformed graffiti into a relational entity that transcends its material dimension and interacts with orders of connection and ethnographic events. This approach offers the possibility of not only studying the meanings of graffiti but also examining what graffiti does and what it can become (Holbraad & Perdersen, 2017; Sansi, 2015; Ingold, 2013; Mitchell, 2005; Strathern, 1995).

I used my experience as an ethnographer as a method to embody not only the creation and perception of graffiti but also how it forms part of broader relations in the city. These ethnographic experiences took part in situations that sometimes overlapped with each other and in which I adopted different roles as an ethnographer: being an observer, an interviewer of graffiti artists and local inhabitants or a story maker about images, places and people

The right to the city was a phrase first coined in the book *Le Droit à la ville* (The Right to the City) by the French sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1991), one of the main intellectual figures of the countercultural movement of May 1968 in Paris., The public space of cities constitutes one of the platforms where this right is negotiated and where protests and graffiti are performed and materialised. These are spaces that are constantly reconfigured by the presence of persons and their public actions, as part of experimental and experiential practices (Butler 2012). Following Jacques Rancière's (2004) conception of "po-

litical aesthetics”, I have been interested in how the “aesthetic techniques” of graffiti can challenge the city’s dominant sensory orders. In this process, the public space and its transformation appear as key elements in protests through different modes of involvement and participation in politics.

The culture of protest and its different ways of expression, including graffiti, have historically formed part of Barcelona and its public space (Delgado, 2002; Kaplan, 1992). I will show how graffiti can be used as a means to reflect on the history and the visual culture of the city in connection with the texture of the street life and its surfaces. To access this entanglement of relations, I have incorporated in my research the idea of the “graffiti texture” as a way of exploring relationships between sensory and symbolic orders in the city. This texture, as I will describe below, is not only created by material surfaces or substances but is also permeated by a plurality of social relations and ways of seeing and participating in the politics of the city.

Dissolving the distinctions between space and time in which the ethnographic events are placed, I will recontextualise my ethnographic material to engage in new relations between the graffiti texture and the culture of protest in Barcelona. Here, I follow Strathern’s idea of the ‘ethnographic moment,’ based on non-linear and ‘multi-temporal’ analogies from comparisons between past fieldwork experiences and present matters (Strathern in Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017, p. 150). This method will help me create relations beyond the visual frame of the graffiti samples and in connection with protest actions and the production of meanings.

Graffiti beyond its imagery frame

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, close to the visual studies frame of interpretation, examines the graffiti artworks in their social and political contexts. Through her photographic work, Cooper represents a complex reality formed by graffiti artworks and the material and social landscape around them. In her visual work, it is possible to perceive different dimensions of graffiti and how they are part of a complex network and interplay of relations. Graffiti artworks in the streets are presented as part of the whole space in which they are located and are not just limited to the frame of a wall as may be presented in a close-up photograph.

Making an analogy between this way of seeing graffiti and Strathern's relational approach to people and things, it is possible to stress two points. Firstly, graffiti artworks are not self-contained entities but are made and remade through relations with persons. There is, therefore, a continuity or interconnection, between people and things, the city and its inhabitants, or images and viewers. Secondly, it is through relations and, therefore, at the point of interactions that different entities 'become' persons and things (Strathern in Sansi, 2015, p. 99). Hence, I understand graffiti images in this article not only in purely aesthetic terms but also as a product of further relations linked to conflicts and power dynamics.

The city of Barcelona and its public space have evoked multiples imaginaries linked to different ways of seeing the city across time: from the "modernist project" linked to the urban extension of the city in the so-called *Plan Cerdà*, 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 use of public spaces for protests, and arriving at the present city, as an example of other post-industrial cities under the so-called *Barcelona Model*. All of these imaginaries contribute to the complexity of Barcelona today, a city that keeps being made and remade out of past, present and future relations. The different images across times and spaces become part of the single general scale of my analysis.

Drawing on Chalfant and Cooper's and Strathern's works, I operate with a broad model, which tackles the interdependence between urban contexts and people, and the agencies of graffiti artists and their works. I explore these aspects in the two graffiti stories in the article: the first linked to the historic graffiti of the anarchist Miquel Pedrola, the second inspired on a photograph of two militia women taken in the Spanish civil war and at present transformed into a graffiti mural.

This model also entails how the visual culture of graffiti interacts with other visual means of communication in the city, such as documentary-photography. Making connections between the documentary photography during the civil war and the present graffiti images, I will compare the production, use and perception of women's images within protest and conflictive contexts. This comparison will reveal how images and their meanings are produced in connection with power dynamics that transgress the boundaries of the images across times and spaces. In this process, the graffiti texture that I propose appears intertwined between the material dimension of the city and the ways of seeing and interacting with it.

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 refer to Walter Benjamin

(2005) and his critique of positivist history and 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 produces a city based on personal stories of the city’s inhabitants, images and spaces, which are not identified with the current touristic city and general history; a city in which there is a great connection between local people and the neighbourhoods where they live. Following their approach to history, I understand the graffiti texture as a means to create stories produced by my experiences in connection with the public process of communication among the city’s inhabitants.

The textural experience of the city

As a way to connect graffiti, people, and the city, one has to enter into relations with the sensory and symbolic orders in which they coexist. In the following section, I describe how graffiti is intertwined with the textural transformation of the city and its human experience. Here, I will introduce part of my latest ethnographic material on the urban transformation of Vallcarca, a neighbourhood in Barcelona (Muñoz, 2019), which will help me to build my understanding of texture as a means to uncover stories embedded in the city’s material and visual surfaces.

The materials, as Ingold argues, are not static entities waiting to be shaped by humans. On the contrary, they can also produce their own stories: ‘... it is up to us, then, to listen, and from the clues it offers, to discover what is speaking’ (Ingold, 2013, p. 31). Following Ingold’s view, I approached the process of urban renewal in Vallcarca beyond human participation (Muñoz, 2019), which led me to see the material environment and its elements as active entities within political and social processes. The material properties of the neighbourhood and its possible futures stimulate the imagination and empower the people involved in these processes. For instance, the existence of empty building sites in the neighbourhood has facilitated community projects in the form of sustainable gardens and urban commons. Also, the periodical creation of anti-tourist graffiti on its walls such as ‘Tourist go home’ or ‘Tourist you are the terrorist’ foster the opening of debates on the impact of mass tourism upon the material and social transformation of the neighbourhood and its inhabitants.

The graffiti murals in Vallcarca, such as the ones in Image 1, also make visible local inhabitants’ protest campaigns against the urban transformation of the neighbourhood. The fact that graffiti 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. It may be possible to identify the sensory order of public space through the human actions and experiences in it and ask how the interactions between cities and human bodies enclose political meanings and notions of injustice.



Image 1: Graffiti Murals in Vallcarca, Barcelona (Photograph by Plácido Muñoz, 2019)

The image of the city is transformed through relationships between political actions and aesthetics and represents particular ways of doing and being in it, which is conceptualised by Rancière (2004) as the “distribution of the sensible”. According to Rancière, it is in the disruption of the distribution of the sensible that politics are made.

The anti-tourist graffiti, which I mentioned above, can be understood as a disruption of the dominant sensory order or distribution of the sensible. Using the public space of the city, these anti-tourist graffiti writers communicate a very specific message, which disrupts the conventional relations between tourists, the tourist city, and its inhabitants. Instead of communicating a welcoming message, these graffiti create unsettling situations for both the tourists and the inhabitants of the city.

I argue that once graffiti are painted and left alone in the public space, they achieve a life of their own, facing and interacting in multiple ways with tourists and inhabitants. In this sense, graffiti expressions are not only isolated material elements but are also embedded in the texture of the city and activate political and social processes. My approach to graffiti implies, therefore, an equality and close identification between humans and the properties of material things in which things can also become political agents. (Sansi, 2015, p. 85).

Anthropologists have focused on the properties of texture to explore how surface plays a key 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 the material object and mental process), which organises the ritual performance according to clan stories, migratory movements and songs. The texture of the *kirugu* 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. When I interviewed the graffiti artist Zosen in Barcelona and asked him about what particular elements of the city inspired him to create his graffiti artworks, he said, referring to the following graffiti mural (Image 2) in the Poble Nou neighbourhood.



Image 2: Zosen and Mina Mural in Can Ricart, Poble Nou (Photograph by Plácido Muñoz, 2014)

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 in all cities but are what I am searching for in

every city that I visit. Our artworks are ephemeral and we paint on surfaces, which have their own stories ... we integrate and add our art-works to those stories.... (Zosen, 2014)

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' (p. 312). Thus Zosen's artworks are not only based on rich and vivid colours that take the form of naïve or tribal symbols but are also charged with serious political intents and activism, which characterise the graffiti aesthetics of Barcelona (Schacter, 2013). Also on this point, Howard Morphy (1989) states about the Yolngu artists of Australia that they deliberately create "shimmering" visual effects in their paintings that draw the attention and response of the Yolngu people because they have learnt how to see them. Texture has the capacity to index what to outsiders and the uninitiated may be invisible and, in this way, graffiti can create awareness among citizens about multiple aspects of the city such as its history, art and politics.

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, which allows us to see graffiti as a movement fueled by creativity and social and material relations as well as ways of seeing and transforming the city. I use the term *texture*, a concept that I have taken from the sociologist Henri Lefebvre (1991), in order to explore the relationship between people and the production of the city space. In this sense, the texture of the city space is based on a material surface covered by a plurality of social networks in constant movement: '... as part of a particular production of space' (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 18). As such, the texture is also shaped by power dynamics and the right to the city. To perceive how the graffiti texture produces spaces and power dynamics in Barcelona, I will tell two stories inspired by two graffiti samples in the city, which will help me to show how the graffiti texture of the city stimulates relations across times and beyond its imagery frame. Both of these graffiti stories are linked to the conflict of the Spanish civil war but transgress the boundaries of time to create new relations and meanings in the present.

Pedrola's historic graffiti

Arguably, today's social conflicts over the right to the city can be traced back to the 19th-century modernist project. At the beginning of the 20th century, the development of a working-class consciousness in Barcelona reinforced the production of a culture of resistance and protest in the city, which used the public space as a way to express its political

claims. The working class and its culture of protest in Barcelona would be key to the process of resistance against the fascist uprising and the Spanish civil war.

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 story about Pedrola's historic graffiti illustrates my argument about how issues of power dynamics and symbolic meanings are deeply embedded in the material surfaces of the city and its 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 construction and transmission of different kinds of knowledge. A good example of this relationship between surfaces, textures, 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 a popular revolutionary uprising fuelled by the power of the anarcho-syndicalism in the city and shaped by libertarian and communist ideologies. In *Homage to Catalonia*, George Orwell (2001) describes 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... (p. 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 how the space was experienced.

During Franco's dictatorship from 1939 to 1978, the revolutionary street names were covered or removed. 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 survived over time and finally become restored as part of the public space. In particular, I wanted to learn about the graf-

fiti containing the words *carrer d'en* , (street of) alongside the name “Miquel Pedrola”. Later, when I interviewed Daniel Cortijo, the local historian and expert in the history of the city who had discovered and fostered the protection of this graffiti, he explained that the graffiti had been painted as an homage to Miquel Pedrola, a young local POUM anarchist who had died fighting on the civil war front.

I use this historic graffiti and its textural properties (i.e., the symbolic and sensory orders attached to it) as a medium through which to relate stories about the city. It offers, for instance, 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 storymaking, I use 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, in which 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, p. 84, as cited by Basso, 1984, p. 44-45). I see graffiti in public space as chronotopes, in which my stories make the experiences in the city take on material grounds through multiple actions, dialogues and participants (ibid., p. 44-45). This story 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.

The historian Daniel Cortijo first heard about the graffiti when the local journalist and writer Josep Maria Huertas Claveria 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*. Eventually, he found traces of it in the corner of a street, and later would end up meeting 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. In this sense, Pedrola’s graffiti was not only a name painted on the wall but also a relational entity, which activated social relations and produced symbolic and political meanings across times. 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, 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.

When I first read about this graffiti in the newspaper. I thought that its conservation was a council initiative. My initial idea changed when I met and interviewed Daniel Cortijo. He made me see how individual and collective grassroots organisations also play a relevant role in the production and conservation of symbolic elements in the public space of the city. Cortijo explained to me that he had to put in much personal effort to involve associations and collectives of the city and circulate his initiative using different platforms of communication. The process intertwined the historic graffiti with multiple social relations until the graffiti was recognised by the council as part of Barcelona's public space. Cortijo described me as follow his first contact with local council:

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... (Cortijo, 2014)¹

After this meeting with representatives of the local council and the limited support he received from them, Cortijo started to publicise the case through local newspapers and 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 reaction shows how the graffiti activated different forms of seeing the city shaped by ideologies and production of antagonistic meanings. Seeing these letters on the wall stimulated emotions, feelings, and injustices,

¹ All translations from Spanish by the author.

which were expressed and perceived in contradictory ways. After two years of grass-roots mobilisations, the local council, through its department of *Paisatge Urba* (Urban Landscape), decided to protect and restore the historic 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.

The history of the modernist and democratic project in Barcelona tells us that the streets were transformed into an arena of public debates and conflicts in which different symbolic and sensory orders existed. As part of it, the graffiti texture is actively reconfigured and embodied by participants through public actions. 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 out the existing graffiti on the walls and later creating graffiti that legitimated the regime (Sempere, 1977). In this sense, the graffiti texture goes beyond the material and visual surface of the city, containing contradictory ways of seeing and experiencing the city.

In the last section of this paper, I will explore further the contradictory relations that the graffiti texture can produce. This time, I will see graffiti murals as chronotopes by which my next graffiti story takes on material grounds (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 84, as cited by Basso, 1984, p. 44-45) through the perception and production of the images of women within conflictive situations.

The perception of images: gender relations and power

Some of the most recognised images of the popular revolution in Barcelona and the Spanish civil war were taken by the documentary photographer, Agustí Centelles. At the time, his photographs were published around the world. Today, they survive in publications and exhibitions and form part of the collective imagery.

The images of the streets of Barcelona during the violent clashes in 1936 keep existing across times and spaces. As Mitchell (2005) argues, images exist in terms of their desires as personified objects and, therefore, within the process of becoming in connection with people's experiences. I encountered one of Centelles's photographs during my fieldwork in Barcelona. The photograph had been transformed into a graffiti mural by the graffiti artist Roc BlackBlock, whom I met and interviewed while painting another mural in the La Carboneria squatted social centre. Both murals formed part of protest interventions

in the public space of Barcelona. The photograph, however, was part of a bigger story, which I will recount below.

At the end of the Spanish civil war, the photographer Agustí Centelles had to cross the border to France and become a war refugee. He safeguarded his photographic work on the civil war by leaving it in the attic of a French family in Carcasona. For more than forty years, the images were not seen, and their stories were forgotten. With the arrival of Spanish democracy in 1978, Centelles made his photographs visible again, and he started to be recognised as a key photographer of the Spanish the civil war. Today, Centelles and his photographs have become symbols of the social and political struggle against the injustices produced during the war and the censorship and persecution of the dictatorship regime in Spain (Pereiga, 2015).

The example of Centelles and his work illustrates the power of images as active political entities embedded in processes of image circulation and perceptions of justice. The connection between documentary photography and graffiti murals also becomes a means to discuss the graffiti texture of Barcelona. To do this, I will look at the graffiti mural created by Rock Block from one of Centelles's images taken during the civil war. The original image was photographed by Centelles at the beginning of the civil war in 1936. The photograph was taken at the front war in Teruel and depicts two youthful militia women wearing overalls military outfits and with guns slung over their shoulders.



Image 3: Roc BlackBlock's tools and copies of the image in preparation to create the mural using stencils

The republic period in Spain, the popular revolution in some cities and the anti-fascist war generated a more progressive discourse about the role of women in society alongside new imagery of them. Shortly after the photograph of the two militia women was captured in 1936, the image made its first public appearance on the cover page of the

Spanish magazine *Cronica* (1929-1939). According to Nash (1989), the editorial of this magazine was shaped by a propagandistic interest linked to the Spanish Republic government. In relation to the militia women's image, Nash (1989) argues that its appearance in the magazine was not directed towards a female audience but aimed to foster male identification with the anti-fascist cause. Rather than fostering a new image of women, the images of the militia women challenged the male cultural identity and aroused their patriotic duty to defend the motherland.

Nash (1989) states that women's role in the anti-fascist resistance was more complex than merely being a soldier and was based on a combination of roles including mothers, educators, and healers, among others. The militia women constituted a very reduced group of women who, after the first stage of the civil war, were displaced from the front line and accused of being a source of distraction for men (ibid.). Finally, it should also be stressed that the imagery produced of women by women's organisations at the time such as *Mujeres Libres* (Free Women) focused not on the war but on the rehabilitation and dignity of women (ibid.). This raises questions about the perception of the role of women in society and how its visibility was instrumentalised and shaped by dynamics of power. However, has this perception travelled to the present when the same image is transformed into a graffiti mural as part of protest actions against fascism in the public space of Barcelona?

The instrumentalisation of the feminist movement by reactionary political parties is quite common in the current Spanish political scenario. To mention one of many cases, the origin and strength of the coronavirus pandemic in Spain has been directly linked to the feminist demonstration on the 8th of March 2020 and its authorisation by the government. The cause has been used to find legal responsibilities and drive a judicial investigation to discredit the feminist movement. However, I want to discuss the perception of the two militia women's image as part of an anti-fascist collective protest campaign at the present time.

The graffiti artist Roc BlackBlock transformed the photograph of the militia women into a graffiti mural using stencils and painted it on the walls of different locations in Barcelona. The murals were part of political campaigns against fascism.

Roc BlackBlock usually collaborates with collectives and “social centres”² of the city. In one of our interviews, I asked him if he thought that what he paints was political graffiti, and he responded:

I don't make any political campaign for anyone through my graffiti, 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 Racisme* (Unity against fascism and racism), in that case I was the communicator for the whole collective (Roc BlackBlock, 2014).



Image 4: Work in the process of the two militia graffiti mural at 'La Casa de la Montaña', Barcelona (Photograph by Plácido Muñoz, 2014)

In this case, the graffiti mural becomes not only the message of an anti-fascist collective but also the source of social relations and production of meanings within the collective and beyond. Roc proposed to the collective his idea for a mural, based on the painting of the photograph of the two militia women, alongside the phrase in Catalan language, *Feixisme mai mes*, (Fascism never again). The collective approved his proposal in an assembly. They obtained permits from the council and provided the materials for the mural. The mural was painted on a wall in the market square in the El Clot neighbourhood on the northern side of Barcelona and later on the wall of the squatted social centre of La Casa de la Montaña (Image 5).

² 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, p. 4).

The first mural was part of a protest campaign against the social centre of La Casa de la Tramontana, which promoted fascists and Nazi ideologies among the adolescents of the neighbourhood. This circumstance provoked the sabotage of the mural several times presumably by people with fascist ideologies. 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 he finally decided to leave it alone in order to make people think about what had been done. The images of the militia women became again part of different political statements but, who was being addressed through these political statements? Was the feminist movement and a different perception of women addressed?



Image 5: Mural at La Casa de la Montaña (Photograph by Plácido Muñoz, 2014)

I want to use this mural to make my final reflections on the textural surface of the public space in Barcelona and how it stimulates disparate ways of seeing and being in the city. Within it, the graffiti texture becomes not only a contested arena for opposing political views, as I have described in relation to the historic graffiti and the graffiti mural, but also the means to explore more subtle relations embedded in it. The perception of the two militia women's image can produce opposite meanings and practices. However, it can also open up discussions about the perception of women as part of conflicts and protests over time. Thus, the graffiti texture moves between symbolic and sensory orders, becoming a tool for communication in the public space and for discussion and debate beyond its visual frame. 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, 2009, p. 126). Denouncing the power of images or denying that power comes down to the same thing: the same recognition of that power (ibid.). Thus not only the practice of graffiti but also the graffiti itself, and what it does, can activate political ideas

and actions connected with material surfaces and expressed across sensory and symbolic orders in the city.

In this sense, the politics of graffiti is developed between different worlds and shaped by collaborations, disruption, or even oblivion and misperceptions among persons and material and visual elements. Looking at graffiti in Barcelona, I have searched for unlikely connections between the graffiti samples that I have described, and the meanings and perceptions attached to them. As the anthropologist Marilyn Strathern (1988) states, it is at the point of interaction between people and things that entities become people and things (Strathern in Sansi, 2015). These interactions, however, can be covered, avoided, subordinated, or forbidden by power relations and the status quo. As an anthropologist, one of my goals is to uncover them and make them accessible.

Conclusion

Throughout my fieldwork in Barcelona, I produced my own texture of the city formed by experiences, material objects and social relations. As time went by, this texture began to expand at the intersection of further research relations across times and spaces and through connecting with people.

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 in the city within a process of becoming. This allows us to look at graffiti not only as images but also as acts embedded in surfaces, sensory orders and social and political relations.

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Povzetek

V članku obravnavam grafite kot odnosne entitete v družbeni in oblastni dinamiki Barcelone. Ob širšem razumevanju grafitov, ki presegajo njegovo materialno dimenzijo, preučujem, kaj grafiti počnejo in kaj postanejo v javnem prostoru mesta. V tem kontekstu vidim javni prostor kot vmesnik med političnimi pomeni in krivicami, ki jih zaznavajo prebivalci mesta. To mi omogoča, da grafite obravnavam kot heterogeno gibanje, ki spodbuja protestne prakse v skupnih prostorih in časih. Za dostop do tega prepletanja odnosov predlagam koncept "teksture grafitov" kot način raziskovanja odnosov med čutnimi in simbolnimi redi v mestu. Te teksture ne ustvarjajo samo materialne površine ali snovi, temveč jo prežema tudi množica družbenih omrežij, ki jih oblikujejo številni načini oblikovanja in gledanja mesta. Na podlagi svojega etnografskega gradiva iz Barcelone sodelujem v "veččasnih" analogijah med grafiti, ki so nastali v mestu in dogodki, povezani s špansko državljansko vojno, z odnosi med spoloma in s protesti. Povezave med njimi bodo uporabljene kot dejavni viri analitičnega razmišljanja in ustvarjanja zgodb za iskanje verjetnih povezav med grafiti in spreminjanjem človeškega dožemanja v času. Poleg tega svoj argument podkrepim in primerjam z vključitvijo glasov grafitarjev in drugih akterjev iz mojih etnografskih raziskav v Barceloni.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: grafiti, tekstura, slika, odnos, Barcelona

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