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**Contemporary engagements within corridors of the past:  
temporal elasticity, graffiti, and the materiality of St. Rock Street, Barcelona.**

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AUTHORS:

Héctor A. Orengo (Catalan Institute of Classical Archaeology)

David W. Robinson (University of Central Lancashire)

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**Hector A. Orengo**

Brief Biography: I obtained my degree at the University of Valencia, which included a Seneca grant to study one year in Barcelona and two Erasmus grants to study for two years at the School of Archaeology and Ancient History of the University of Leicester. At present I am at the Catalan Institute of Classical Archaeology, producing my PhD and collaborating as a landscape researcher in five projects.

Telf. (0034) 977249133 ext. 210  
Fax (0034) 977224401  
e-mail horengo@icac.net

Catalan Institute of Classical Archeology  
Pl. Rovellat s/n  
C.P. 43003, Tarragona  
Spain

**David W. Robinson**

Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Bristol

*Teaching Fellow in Historical Archaeology*  
Archaeology & Anthropology  
University of Bristol  
43 Woodland Road,  
Clifton, Bristol. BS8 1UU. UK  
tel: +44 (0)117 331 1188  
fax: +44 (0)117 954 6001  
email: dwr25@cam.ac.uk

Brief Biography: My research focuses upon the material enculturation of landscape and environment from spatial and temporal perspectives. I have conducted fieldwork in the United Kingdom, India, Spain, and California, the latter of which was the focus of my PhD dissertation on rock-art, landscapes, and taskscapes. I currently am focussing on the importance of rock-art to Historical Archaeology, approaches to colonial archaeology, and indigenous contributions to modernity derived from an archaeological approach.

**Abstract:** In a medieval Barcelonian side-street, urine, rubbish, and a bewildering array of graphic imagery splatters the narrowing walls between two major thoroughfares. A contemporary conflict between residents, unknown artists and others is played out using banners, bottles, stickers, posters, stencils, spray paint, and bodily substances. In this shadowed liminality, local and global debates are superimposed upon substructures constructed from disease, prostitution, and the Saint of the Plague. The continuing urban struggle constitutes temporal statements of dirt and purity, violence and humour, dominance and resistance, death and salvation. Like the renovated facades masking the crumbling remains of structures long neglected, the government's literal whitewashing of the art is a temporal cover-up of a discursive symptom stretching from deeply embedded preconditions. However, from his niche in the angular bend of the alley bearing his name, the statue of St. Rock remains unblinkingly staring, raised above the contestations expressed below.

### **Key words**

Graffiti; pollution; temporality; materiality; contestation

### **Introduction**

Situated in the medieval Gothic quarter of Barcelona, a narrow alley connects two busy thoroughfares while paralleling the always crowded Ramblas Avenue. Most people stroll by, entirely unaware or simply uninterested by the modest sign announcing, *Carrer d'en Roca* (Mr. Roca Street). For those who do choose to leave the crowded thoroughfare, they may traverse a street just one hundred and seventy two meters long and scarcely three meters wide. In stark contrast to the bright main roads, the narrows of this alley are illuminated only dimly: a shadowed, unwelcoming atmosphere gives way to a sharp angle at approximately half of the street's long axis, providing a space slightly wider than before. At this midpoint nook, a small chapel appears in the angle, about three meters high on the southeast facing wall: within the chapel niche, muted lighting glows from behind a statue looking down upon those rare walkers passing-by (Figure 1). It is here, and in the moment of passing through, that St. Rock Street comes

into being. Moving on, the street narrows once more, the corners again become obscured in the dark, then re-emerges into the busy foot traffic at the end of what here is called *Calle de Roca*.

Inescapable to the eye is profusely applied graffiti interspersed along the walls of this street bearing three names. Trash, urine, and other detritus reflecting 'impure' or unsavoury behaviour is most conspicuous in the mid-alley kink. There is a marked contrast between the main thoroughfares, relatively clean of graffiti and rubbish, and the sprawling examples of painted and other statements in the confines of Carrer d'en Roca. Ferrell's (1993) argument that graffiti in the North American city of Denver "constitutes a form of anarchist resistance to political and economic authority" (*ibid.* 187) provides one explanation for the placement of such 'anti-social' materiality adjacent yet separated from mainstream population corridors. Similar to Ferrell, more recent studies have examined the social, artistic, and political context for the making of graffiti (for instance Bowen 1999; Halsey and Young 2006; Kan 2001; Peteet 1996; Phillips 2002; Rahn 2002; Ross *et al.* 2001). Fewer studies have taken into account graffiti as material culture (for instance Rivière 2005), while it is even rarer for research to adopt an explicitly archaeological approach in considering deeper urban temporalities influencing the actions of modern inhabitants such as graffiti makers (for a time perspective, see McCormick and Jarman's 2005 look at life-histories of urban murals in Belfast). In an environment constituted wholly of material culture, graffiti—like other examples of archaeological materiality—quite literally 'draws upon the past' (cf Robinson 2006). Even as the constructed environment provides the material preconditions for urban behaviours, the contemporary inhabitants may be unaware of that past. It is in this sense that contemporary engagements occur within and are influenced by the corridors of the past, but not necessarily from conscious pre-understandings. Rather, the past may be influential in subtle and often unappreciated manners. Differing materiality's have different scales, in degrees of endurance and influence: overlapping through time, different forms of material culture stretch through portions of urban history. This temporal elasticity enables past material culture to play roles in the present at particular places. It is because of this interplay between time with space-and-material culture that this is fundamentally an archaeological issue. Since the past may exert influences in manners beyond people's awareness, rather than take an ethnographic approach, we adopt what we term an 'archaeological attitude' to explicate ongoing material

engagements within contemporary social interactions occurring in the specific space of St. Rock Street. It is a space where past conceptions of purity are reflected into present contestations. Through this study of the material and social history of a single alleyway in Barcelona, we show how the past subtly but tenaciously exerts influence within contemporary engagements.

### *A historiography of the impure: 'bad life' people of En Roca Street*

Ferrell (1993:7-10) has traced the roots of modern graffiti to the hip-hop sub-culture scene of the mid-1970s, starting in New York before proliferating internationally (see Chalfant & Prighoff 1987). The graffiti sprawled on the walls of *En Roca Street* is a contemporary example of the growth of this modern form of urban graphic imagery. However, we examine the art here not from an international perspective, but rather as an *in situ* process. This is not to deny the global influences at work—indeed, we will discuss how some of the art directly addresses discourses on nationalism and globalism; but in environments with deeply situated histories such as the city of Barcelona, the localized 'city as theatre' (see O'Keeffe & Yamin 2006: 91-95) is seen as the primary setting for discourses in modernity to play out. As an exemplar of a performative space, the corridor of St. Rock Street is a stage where graphic displays are mapped. This modern example of urban graphic imagery led us to investigate its urban genesis and growth documented graphically in medieval and later maps (see S. de Beaulieu, 1698). Documentation suggests this area's urban shape was already developed by the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Busquets & Pastor 2005:122), while the first appearance of the name 'Carrer d'en Roca' is found in medieval documents dating to the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Borau 2003: 197; Batlle & Vinyoles 2002:116). Importantly, Tarradell et al. (1985:43) suggest Barcelona's gothic urban form has not suffered significant changes from medieval times.

At this early stage, Roca Street, set in the poorest neighbourhood of Barcelona, was mainly occupied by people of lower social status (Borau 2003:174). It also appears that from the beginning the street was associated with 'impure' behaviour such as prostitution. During the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries prostitution was regarded as a necessary evil. Prostitutes were confined to public institutionalised brothels. Here, we can see tensions concerning cultural concepts of dirt and purity (Douglas 1966) were early-on

associated with the street. Those brothels were located within a closed and isolated neighbourhood in the suburbs of Barcelona city (Vinyoles 1985: 122; Batlle 1988: 438). This spatial segregation of the ‘impure’ is also documented in many other European cities of this period (the city of Florence being a good example in Brackett 1993:296). Documents indicate there was a strong spatial division between the morally accepted behaviours and those socially sanctioned in medieval times. Written records reflect the authorities’ efforts to limit the spatial presence of prostitution outside the proper institutional brothels and prevent the expansion of prostitution through the city. In this sense, 15<sup>th</sup> century edicts were continuously pronounced to keep prostitutes away from En Roca Street surroundings (Vinyoles 1976: 57). Numerous examples show that, despite the authorities attempts, prostitution tended to expand beyond the ‘appropriate’ places (see Vinyoles 1985). Anti-prostitution rhetoric was stated in one of Catalonia constitutions dictated by Pere the third, while one of Saint Vicent Ferrer’s sermons advocated that “particular brothels must be located in the cities corners and never in the cities centres” and called for laws to prevent prostitutes’ presence out of the brothels “under threat of flogging” (translated from Vinyoles 1985: 122).

It is in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (AAVV 1907: 606) when we first find En Roca Street directly associated with pollutive and antisocial behaviours. In this document there is an edict prohibiting the establishment of hostels, restaurants, bars or any other place where food or drink could be obtained due to the presence in Roca street of “bad life” people. This evidence indicates that the area around Roca Street was embroiled from very early times in discursive conflicts between the mainstream establishment and those antithetical to it. Then, as in the centuries to come, people transgressed socially sanctioned spaces, creating opportunities for conflict.

In the eighteenth century, linked to the plagues ravaging the city of Barcelona, a chapel dedicated to “Sant Roc” was constructed in the nook. Saint Roc is the saint to which prayers concerning plague and disease are addressed. Most probably, this chapel was created in order to counteract the potentially pollutive actions (see Douglas 1965) happening at this spot: certainly it reiterates an embedded sense of malignancy in the confines of the street. The placing of a statue to the Saint of the Plague reflects an attempt to socialize the disease associated with an area already infamous for anti-mainstream behaviour.

Even in the more recent times, En Roca Street is filled with references to antisocial activity. During the 1970s En Roca Street remained related to prostitution (Formosa 1997, Casadesus 2005). Contemporary Roca street neighbours have made public their discontent through a popular Barcelona newspaper (Colomé 2005). They were unhappy about the use of the street as an open brothel, upset that prostitutes were getting their clients in the adjacent Ramblas. The neighbours were quoted in the news as being tired of finding used condoms at their doors. They also protested the use of the street as a urinary, and the constant presence of graffiti along the street walls. These traces of material substances, most of them non-hygienic ones, are antagonizing the residents on a daily basis. Such everyday conflicts reveal En Roca Street's contested nature. The long tradition of illegal prostitution in this street is reflected in the setting of the back door of Barcelona's Erotic Museum in En Roca Street. However, prostitution is just one aspect of En Roca street's hidden history: as the neighbours openly acknowledge, the area is currently well known to 'dope fiends,' graffiti painters, and 'night enjoyers'.

### ***The constructed environment***

The physical characteristics of En Roca Street in many respects provide the spatial preconditions for such pollutive behaviours. Those characteristics can be divided in two main factors: the street's situation and its shape.

Medieval En Roca Street's location between two of the city gates and just in front of the gothic city walls (Figure 2) is an important characteristic to regard in the understanding of its relationship with antisocial behaviours. Referring to the medieval walls of Barcelona, Duran states (1972: 479) their proximity facilitates 'residual spaces' that were usually employed as open brothels. During the Middle Ages, city gates were points of commerce and hot spots for illegal prostitution. These were places where prostitutes could meet their clients and take them to their rooms, located in more private places but not far from the gates—En Roca street was situated in such proximity.

In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Barcelona's population increased, but the city did not expand beyond its walls, putting stress upon the available space in the ever constricting old city. To compensate, many middle age dwellings were replaced by

taller buildings, in an effort to maximize vertical space (Carrer 1951:177; Fabre and Huertas 1977: 153). These urban changes affected most of En Roca Street dwellings: however, even though many buildings were altered—some being entirely replaced and others made taller—the original gothic shape of the street as a corridor with its nook was not modified. Even though largely rebuilt, in plan, the street shape shows no structural modifications in XVII century and later maps consulted.

However, such vertical urban adjustments were not enough to deal with the accumulating population growth in old Barcelona city—the scarcity of space continued being a serious problem to increasing populations. One of the most important consequences of this overcrowding was the development of bad sanitary conditions in the old city—it has been demonstrated that Barcelona was particularly punished by epidemics (Fabre and Huertas 1977:156). Just as the form of the street persisted, the pervasive environmental situation sustained a type of ever-present malignancy affecting successive generations. And so it was that in the reconstruction stage of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that the chapel to the Saint of the Plague was created. Thus, the placement of a chapel to St. Rock can be further understood as an attempt to address the ongoing festering unsanitary conditions.

While the shape of the street has remained constant, the street's relation to modern Barcelona has seen substantial changes; nevertheless, some of its previous attributes stretch into its contemporary context. Due to the modern development of the city, the street is now located in a very central place: in this sense, it can be seen now as an isolated space within the city core. The historic nature of the old city, together with its proximity to the sea, has transformed it into one of the most attractive quarters in Barcelona. The street now is sought for by those looking for a flat to rent or buy. The old city is likewise a bustling centre for vivacious leisure activities. A great number of pubs, restaurants, shops and public open-air performances (mimes, concerts, theatre, etc.) are set in the old city creating an excellent environment for parties, nightclubbing and urban activity. However, the same 'impure' or antithetical activities continue to occur within En Roca Street for similar reasons: its closeness to the Ramblas with a constant flux of tourists facilitates both the prostitutes and their clientele, while the consequences of nightclubbing activities leading to litter, urinary use, late night noise, and graffiti drawing within the walls of the street. In short, despite changes, the

location continues to prompt societal conflict: in the contemporary situation, this is now between people who reside on the street and people who use it temporarily for leisure or other less savoury purposes.

### ***Shape, view, and hidden locations***

As already alluded to, the distinct shape of En Roca Street is an important factor when considering the urban activities developed within it. The shape of the typical medieval street in Barcelona is a narrow, bended alley: En Roca Street is unusual in its sharp angle at approximately the half of the street's long axis. This angle breaks the street straightness into two different spaces giving the street an unusual “thunder-bolt” shape (left inset, Figure 2). It also creates a wider area, allowing more space than other portions of the alley. This nook creates a sense of room in the corridor, facilitating pauses and momentary dwelling. However, the most important consequence of such an angle is not only that a nook is created, but that this space avoids visual connection between both street inlets. This characteristic undoubtedly has influenced the development of hidden ‘antisocial’ activities throughout its history. This relationship within narrow and bended alleys and antisocial behaviours was commented upon in the XVIII century when a proposal was made for broadening and straightening Trentaclaus Street—a Gothic-quarter alley close to En Roca Street. Trentaclaus Street similarly housed illegal prostitution during the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century (Carrer 1951:173; Vinyoles 1985: 123) and such proposals were attempts to encourage walkers to pass by while making it more difficult for anti-social behaviour the space to happen by exposing those spaces to view.

Viewshed analyses were carried out to show visibility patterns from both En Roca Street inlets. As illustrated in Figure 3, the only point with no direct visibility from each street inlet is the central nook. This space is precisely where the densest concentration of material culture linked with anti-social behaviours is located (rubbish, urine, graffiti, used condoms, etc). Judging from this, visibility arises as a key factor when regarding the occurrence of potentially pollutive material culture in urban contexts. This may explain the location of Saint Roc chapel at precisely this spot, the central point where prostitution, diseases and other pollutive activities concentrated within En Roca Street. The image of the saint—with the signs of the plague infecting his leg—does not just

ward off plague with its presence, nor only act as a guardian, but is a reminder of what could happen to those people conducting unsanctioned behaviours in this spot. This relationship between sex and plague has been widely acknowledged in medieval and later documentation (see as an example Tarena 1507).

The lack of visibility may also be an important factor to explain the lack of visitors. During the tenure of our observations, we found that people rarely ventured into the dark of the alley: it seems people tend not to pass through a street they cannot see very far in to. The combination of the absence of pedestrians, its visual isolation, and its **situated location** makes this space an ideal environment for the practice of socially sanctioned activities.

This factor is further illustrated by the type graffiti and its distribution along the alley: areas closest to the inlets, corresponding to the highest visibility patterns from outside the street, have markings that can be made rapidly, particularly "tags" (monochrome markings, usually stylized signatures) or pre-prepared stickers (convenient and quickly applied to surfaces). Travelling further into the street, "throw-up's" (bi-chrome compositions, again typically elaborated signatures) begin to become more numerous. And then, once in the nook area, "pieces" (polychrome compositions) are positioned in the region of lowest intervisibility. To make these illegal, multi-colour pieces requires the greatest amount of uninterrupted time: it is in the nook area—the darkest area of the street—where graffiti artists can work unseen for the longest periods of time.

### *Micro-temporalities of urban space and 'pollutive' acts*

Just as the micro dynamics of time are linked to physical space is important to the graffiti artists, the same was true in earlier times. We have so far charted the effect of the constructed environment throughout the deeper time scale of centuries. The constricted space facilitated the continuity of behaviours standing in opposition to the norms of mainstream Barcelona: nevertheless, when viewed in shorter time frames, such activities were prescribed a physical and specific time by mainstream society. Historical documentation shows spatial and temporal prescription for 'impure' activities. During Easter season in medieval times, Barcelona's prostitutes were retained in a convent to avoid any pollutive contact with honourable citizens (Vinyoles 1985: 125-

126). They were literally removed out-of-site, cloistered from mainstream public view. Both proper and improper activities were associated with certain places and certain times (for another example see Brackett 1993:177): the interjection of sacred holidays such as Easter created a time-space when the *status quo* between the pure and impure was no longer tolerated.

Narrowing the temporal focus even further, the daily change from diurnal to nocturnal phases marks one time categorization within which certain activities could be undertaken. Bells were first installed in Barcelona institutional buildings in the 14<sup>th</sup> century—from this moment onwards time was not just measured but *imposed* as a clear symbol of authority to control temporal aspects of daily life (Batlle 1988: 404). Following Lukis (2005, 2006) we can see how time and space are linked within systems of authority, and as two aspects of the same phenomenon are key when considering the ongoing creation of places (Ingold 1993; Darvill 1997). From the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century the sound of the bell called “seny del lladre” (bell of the thief) audibly marking the official beginning of the night, with the closing of the city’s gates and the withdrawal of the Barcelona honourable citizens from the street into their houses (Batlle 1988: 405; Vinyoles 1985: 122): night-fall, darkness, and the obscuring of vision where associated with urban illegal activities, played out at differing scales of time, linked to space, renewed every evening throughout the Medieval period.

### ***The contemporary personae of En Roca Street***

In the contemporary setting of modern Barcelona, En Roca Street’s physical space can be understood as the combination of different places created by different people at different times according to their needs and context. In this sense different social actors are sharing the same physical space of the street, but not entirely at the same time. In one respect, the street exists as an *axis mundi* in its core position in the most ancient part of the city—an origin and centre from which newer places have been created. People live in flats on the street: these neighbours can enjoy a central place with wide transport options and close proximity to events in the city core. Drinkers look for a place where they can enjoy their party lifestyle and Barcelona’s Gothic quarter is an area full of pubs, bars and, discos. Graffiti painters enjoy their own distinguished art gallery open to the public at any time close to high-traffic, transited areas. Prostitutes, as in earlier

times, can get their clients from the crowded Ramblas Avenue while doing their business within an enclosed place where they can not easily be surprised. Another group, the typical dispassionate pedestrian, is an apparently passive audience who use the street as a transitory place.

In short, we have identified four categories of people with vested interest **in the use the street:**

- 1: neighbours—permanent inhabitants of the place.
- 2: graffiti makers—those who leave messages in pen, paint, stencils, and stickers.
- 3: night enjoyers—night clubbers and other partiers who enter the street late, leaving marks/scents in urine and party detritus.
- 4: prostitutes and their clientele—using the street at night, some may have private residences.

While the physical space is shared, each group's use of the space has a unique time frame, with only occasional overlap. Neighbours use the physical street space when passing to reach their houses, or when leaving them. Graffiti painters enter at night when neighbours are sleeping or more quickly during daytime when the residents are away working. Night enjoyers come to drink in the street, particularly at weekend nights. Prostitutes use the street during very short periods, also mainly at night but when no other group is occupying the space. Of course, these categories are not always mutually exclusive. But, importantly, we have been able to identify these social personae through their material traces left in the confines of St. Rock Street. Further, it can be seen that these different categories of people all share a space, but not without contention. Each group maintains its own interpretation of how space should be inhabited, engaging differently in the exploitation of the space—they use different media as signs to direct their displeasure towards the others.

### ***Contemporary material contestations***

There is an open conflict between these groups, a conflict that it is amenable to analysis because it is developed in the physical, structured by street walls, doors, windows, pavement, and so on. At first glance, the sprawling graffiti, the trash in the corners, and the urine stains promote an impression of an uncared for place. However, in actuality,

the converse is true—the graffiti, the trash, and the urine are all statements of and about concern for the place itself. There appears to be no substantial face-to-face contact between neighbours, graffiti painters or night enjoyers: contact occurs through the signals of materials and substances. More to the point, each group's conceptions and ideas of the use of the place are inseparable from those material signals, since they are the catalyst for the conflict. This conflict is grafted onto the architectural background of the street where these ideas of place are given expression: material traces are therefore at the very heart of this engagement—traces are expressions (painting, pissings, rubbish, banners, stickers and so on), traces are the very problem (for the neighbours, making the place impure), and traces are the vehicle for commenting on the problem (discourse between the differing *personae*).

These material arguments are subsets of a progression discourse of conflict becoming the tangible background of the street, a graphic battlefield open to personal expressions of all kind reflecting individual and group images of how the space should be used and understood.

- The Neighbours—They want a nice clean street: a good reflection of their high social status. The location of the street makes it a very expensive place to buy a flat. Inhabitants try to force politicians to get involved in the struggle for nice streets. Neighbours' protests arise against graffiti artists and noisy drinkers but they also react against each other and their own neighbour's use of the place. Banners emerge as officious signs (see Hermer and Hunt 1996) from within the buildings, strung across the alley and draped from balconies safely raised, like the statue of St. Rock, above the reach of those below. They proclaim their disgust with the unsanctioned activity at their doorsteps: banners are not fixed in place, they can be removed easily, but coming from the residents they undoubtedly reflect what they see as a legitimate signalling of their own rights to inhabit the street and decide its use. Of course, in newspaper advertisements, they make no reference to this contestation: the adverts project the Neighbours' image of what St. Rock Street should be, denying what it actually is.
- Graffiti painters—Their use of the street is most often restricted to night when neighbours are sleeping and there are not people in the streets who may interrupt their craft. Their activities are not legal and they have to be careful in assuring they

are not going to be discovered. The Graffiti painters respond to the Neighbours' banners and ownership claims, using their graphic skills to convey sarcasm, along with a certain sense of superiority in pointing out the hypocrisy of the claim that graffiti is dirty while the Neighbours dump trash into the street. But Graffiti makers are also concerned with other discourses: comments are made on the war on terror, globalism, plus national, local, and street politics. While their actions are legitimized and gain force because it stands in contradistinction to mainstream authority (Dennant 1997), they nevertheless must conform to their own internal rules and codes or bear the brunt of criticism from within their own ranks (see Ferrell 1993).

- Night enjoyers—Their activities in the street are primarily restricted to weekend nights, and constitute the least cohesive or direct voice in the mix. Bottles, cans and pissings are traces to their use of the place. A certain swagger is transmitted, along with disrespect for both the Neighbours' and Graffiti artists' more substantial claims of spatial authority. It is important to regard noise here because it is a way that weekend drinkers signal their own presence and is one of the most serious conflict sources between neighbours and drinkers. This conflict is reflected by neighbours' angry banners and no urinating stickers—the drinkers counter, sarcastically using the stickers as targets for pissing. The graffiti artists are quick to comment: they alter stickers to make their own statements (see Figure 4g).

As there is little or no physical contact between those different groups, their appropriation of the space is bound to specific times and daily rhythms through the conjunction/separation of space, time and people. The material culture left in the space is a major cause of conflict between the different people occupying different street-time. Figures 4h (a used condom), 4i (urine stain), and 4j (party detritus) all show the typical traces that night enjoyers and prostitutes' clients can leave as a mark of their street use. In a sense, material culture can be seen to trespass out from its own time frame (for instance, the night-time moment of making a 'piece', a work of art by graffiti artists) by entering into another groups' time (in the day-time, the 'piece' becomes a defacement in residents' eyes). Of course, conflict arises.

Material culture then becomes consciously employed to explicitly leave “time messages” that will reach other groups in their own street-time. Figure 3 shows the ways in which material culture is used to engage and criticize other groups’ conception of place. Figure 4d shows how neighbours’ rubbish is placed to partially cover a graffiti panel. Banners and stickers (Figures. 4b and 4c) are left by the neighbours’ reproaching night enjoyers’ attitudes. In the same way graffiti painters make known their annoyance with night enjoyers’ use of the space, mocking their party-making (Figure 4e). Graffiti artists and night enjoyers both critic a neo-Nazi’s swastika, the first with circle-slash negation, the second with urine (Figure. 4i). The neighbours’ appeal with a banner for governmental help reflects their claim as the mainstream authority for the imposition of their idea of what En Roca Street should be (Figure 4a). Graffiti painters respond against this mainstream claim (Figure 4g): their expressions do not appeal to the government since doing so would undermine their antithetical position.

Here, we can see how material culture signifies multiple claims over space; it shows the way in which a particular space has been used by different groups, in this case mutually intolerant of the other: consequently, the streets’ physical frame—constructed and influenced by a much deeper history—is used to sustain the different groups’ claims over the space. The material culture and physical frame of En Roca street thus exemplify Marshall McLuhan’s (1969: 29) famous statement “the medium is the message.”

### ***Discussion***

Despite the architectural changes through the last 700 years, the street has essentially retained its 14<sup>th</sup> century shape: thus though its’ temporal tenacity, the street continues to influence the way people live and move about the Gothic quarter. Just as the form of the street persists, the pervasive environmental situation sustained a long-lived sense of malignancy affecting successive generations. And so it was that in the reconstruction stage of 18<sup>th</sup> century that the chapel to the Saint of the Plague was created. As St. Rock is associated with the cure of infectious diseases (Carrer 1951:227; Duran 1972:467-469), particularly plagues, the placement of a chapel of St. Rock can be understood as an attempt to address the ongoing festering unsanitary conditions.

The association of St. Rock Street and ‘seedier’ aspects of urban existence certainly can be identified as a continuing trend into the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, with ongoing narratives of prostitution, sex, and drug consumption. It is tempting to argue that this attribute of dirtiness—from plague, disease and prostitution—has for a very long time clung to the street, contributing to practices unsanctioned by those who consider themselves the mainstream occupants of the city. Today, in its modern construct, the street with a tattoo parlour, the erotic museum backdoor, graffiti, banners, and messages of all sorts shows the fluidity of self-construction—but they are, as in the past, self-constructions antithetical to dominant social norms.

And so it is that a tension arises in the juxtaposition of the sanctioned and the unsanctioned, that which is clean and that which is dirty. In a true Mary Douglas (1966) fashion, graffiti itself is considered dirty, pollutive, even dangerous, through its lack of social sanctioning, and its marring of clean surfaces. Douglas’ argument (1965:201) that the “dangers and punishments attached to pollution act simply as means of enforcing conformity,” actually empowers those who engage in ‘pollutive’ acts within this urban context. It is the idea of dirtiness that has become the focal issue for current contestations being played out in the narrow alleyway: dirtiness is the vehicle and the weapon of choice, by the many of the combatants involved.

Conceptions of space are central in the creation and maintenance of, not just social roles of the mainstream and the anarchic, but individual personality. Out of this ongoing contestation, an experimental space had come into operation in the confrontation of ideas and styles: upon occasion, out of this experimentation identity emerges. De Diego (2000:16) has defined graffiti as a symbolic appropriation of space and, at the same time an identity mechanism. However, identity, sense of self, and personality are not just a one way relation. As the hip-hop movement was a factor in the spread of graffiti on a global scale, localized influences disseminate through the city at the level of *habitus*. Just as the artist’s identity is modified through experimenting on the street walls, the street simultaneously is shaped by this use through the superimposition of new meanings and ideas: one artist named "Rocket" has modified the St. Rock sign to represent his own name, while in turn adopting the sign’s font in other tags across the city. Here, we can witness the melding of place identity and personal identity.

As a "crime of style" (Ferrell 1993), graffiti's association with the unsanctioned attracts the attention of authority. During our documentation of the street, a literal white

washing of the walls obliterated the paintings, marks, and stickers. It is interesting to note that in Barcelona, alterations of historic buildings usually involve a complete gutting of the interior framework, with only the external facade being preserved. The ethic of conservation is, quite literally, superficial: and so is the officious attempt to cleanse St. Rock of its dirtiness. In the dark space at its midpoint, the texture of St. Rock Street continues to attract markings, on its walls, along cracks in the fabric of buildings, door knobs, window frames—all are re-appropriated by the graffiti artists. The discourse continues, almost with renewed vigour in the opportunity proffered by the 'clean slate' the city council offers periodically.

### ***Conclusion***

Material culture has been used to sustain each group's claims over the En Roca Street space. This space has very different meanings to these different groups. Much of this materiality is closely associated to the activities performed, being essential to the group's self-identification and internal cohesion. In this regard, material culture reflects each group specific urban expression. Consequently, it can also be employed as a means of implicit and explicit claims over a contested space. Furthermore, physical spaces should also be regarded as forms of materiality since they can be transformed to adapt to social meanings, a fact particularly appropriate to the urban environment constituted almost wholly of material culture.

En Roca Street research shows that understanding the appropriation of space and its links to multiple temporalities enables interpreting how social relations have been developed throughout the past. In this way the concept of social time becomes not just a frame to analyse social actions, but part of the conceptualization of spaces used, created, and manipulated by people to sustain and impose their perceptions. In addition, these social actions create the historical and material preconditions that endure through time, influencing subsequent actions by stretching across multiple time-scales. Here, and in large part because of its multi-temporality, we agree with Peteet's (1996: 155) and Halsey and Young's (2006) view of graffiti as more than simply signifying or reflecting those social actions, but as actively intervening within and 'affecting' contested social relations.

Of course, St. Rock Street is not the only place exhibiting graffiti and local conflict. Other corridors within Barcelona involving isolated cores, central positions and aspects associated with dirtiness exhibit similar manifestations. All of them illustrate a confrontation between diverse conceptions of space by means of material traces. The exploitation of space is influenced by differences in the shape and positions of street architecture—itself an artifice of the past. The material remains are in actuality the archaeological correlates of both actors and actions, no matter how distant in the past or near to the present. In contemporary temporal terms, it is the relationship between the actors' presence opposed to their absence that enables this discourse to take shape. The character of a place has to be always evaluated in a determinate time frame regarding different social actors. Those social actors will create and recreate their sense of self and community (painters, neighbours, and so on) framed by their use of space, which in turn will change the personality of the place and its significance. By recognizing the elasticity of temporal significances stretching from deep contingent time scales to contemporary daily tempos, the preconditions formulating the setting for modern conflicts and its material traces within such urban corridors can be understood in archaeological terms.

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