Redesigning Public Space.
A sensory analysis of regenerated public places in el Raval, Barcelona
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I would like to start this paper by asking the question: "what does urban regeneration actually consist of?" Recently regeneration has been defined in the following ways:

"[Regeneration entails] a comprehensive and integrated vision and action which leads to the resolution of urban problems and which seeks to bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of an area that has been subject to change." (Roberts 2000:p.17)

Implicit in this statement is a value judgment on an area’s public life and physical space, which is identified as ‘problematic’ because of its perceived social, economic and physical decay. The regeneration is thus directed at revitalizing the public life, changing it. The aim of the intervention is to dismiss the aura of marginality and deterioration that has been identified with a place in the past. The first step in transforming an area is changing its physical infrastructure. On the one hand this strips it of its negative image and any prior associations the public may have had; on the other, it invites new uses and transforms it into an attractive place for investing capital in the form of businesses, residences or leisure outlets. This physical re-designing and spatial re-structuring of the place can be interpreted, as Miles (2000) argues, as a cultural re-coding of the place. It involves demolishing obsolete buildings - as happened around the Liverpool Docks; introducing new flagship projects - such as the Tate Modern at Bankside in London or the Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona in el Raval or re-adapting old buildings to new uses - such as transforming industrial warehouses into lofts or a church into a bookshop, such as here in el Raval.

Hence, we can state that regeneration is altering the ‘look and feel’ (Hall and Hubbard 1998) of particular neighbourhoods. These physical changes in the public spaces of a city are discussed by some post-modern commentators in terms of a set of visual strategies, which can be summed up under the heading of ‘aestheticization’.

The key features of aestheticization are described as:
• the importance attached to imagery in the city,
• the prevalence of spectacle in the city,
• the self-conscious creation of a city lifestyle,
• the stylisation of whole city areas.

The aim of this paper is to expand and explore this notion of aestheticization by drawing on the original Greek meaning of the word ‘aesthesis’, which refers to “the perception of the external world by the senses” (Collins Dictionary 1986). Thus, my study seeks to examine the actual articulation of aestheticization in the everyday life of regenerated public spaces by analysing the multi-sensory experience derived from place. Or, in other words, how are transformations of space experienced in everyday life. I will argue that analysing the spatial constitution of public spaces from a sensory perspective provides an insight into complex and subtle forms of power relations in regeneration projects. Ways of including and excluding certain practices, memories, meanings of place that are important in the constitution of public spaces and public life.

Theoretical and methodological background
To start I will briefly summarize my theoretical and methodological approach. I start from the premise that our geographical experience and imagination is based on the interplay of body, senses and place. The combination of different senses contributes to our spatial orientation, an awareness of spatial relationships and the appreciation of the qualities of particular places (Rodaway 1994). How we structure a space and define a place is based on our sensory perception. While in the western world there has been a clear dominance of the visual - in our everyday perception most of us ‘see’ aided by the interplay of all the senses. We can only make sense of the whole when combining the information of all the senses. On the other hand, senses never exist on their own, but are framed in context and in relation to an object. They need a reference, objects, which they define. We do not experience sense in a vacuum but need to be confronted with a material world for the senses to exist as for example a flower we smell, a path we step on and touch, or food we taste. Objects afford us with particular sensescapes. Thus, a constant interaction between our bodies and material reality constitutes our experience of daily life.

Recently Urry (2000) has used the notion of ‘affordances’ of environments or objects, to draw attention to the fact that senses connect hybrid objects, the human and non-human. The term was first developed by the ecological psychologist James Gibson (1986) and meant that the composition and layout of environments ‘affords’ certain types of behaviour. Thus there is not an objective reality out there, but affordances are qualities in the environment perceived relatively by the
observer. Affordances are the values and meanings of our surroundings that individuals sensuously perceive. Hence, affordances are not already there, inscribed in space but activated through people’s sensory experiences - by the moving through, touching, smelling, hearing, seeing of objects and places. We can state therefore that while the human subject is embodied – it is the senses that connect human capacities with objects. Examples of affordances are: a large open square that allows the gathering of large groups of people; a tinted glass building that allows viewing the outside from within, but not the inside from without; or a particular building that affords and triggers certain memories. Thus, we can view the experience of place as an active dialogical expression between users of space and the possibilities that the constitution of that place engenders. Space is performative in that it affords certain practices, sensory experiences, but at the same time performed through the actions and experiences attributed to this particular place. As we will see, the reconfiguring of public space involves a reconfiguration of affordances and resistances, which is a very sensual enterprise.

But how can we make operational this sensory framework to discover power relations in the environment? Lefebvre’s concept of rhythm analysis (1991,1996) can help us. It refers to the ways that the predominance of particular sensescapes demarcate a place. These sensescapes fluctuate in intensity and in their relationships. What or who is seen, heard, touched, tasted and smelled is connected to questions about what is included or excluded in the experience of public space, thus an expression of power and the “ability of certain groups to superimpose their rhythms on others.” (Allen 1999:p.65).

This study seeks to build on this notion of rhythm but furthermore highlight that these rhythms are experienced and interpreted by a variety of users in different ways, in different contexts. Rhythms refer to the fluent processes of sensory experience. However, buildings are also experienced in their present materiality and are exposed to different future projections, memories or present associations that allude to a variety of time frames. Senses engage us with traces of time inscribed in this urban landscape that are already vanishing, or yet to come. I will now illustrate these abstract ideas in the case study of el Raval.

2. El Raval - a short historical overview
El Raval, in Barcelona, was and still is a very densely populated area¹. It is considered as ‘marginal’ due to its poor housing conditions; its predominantly working class and immigrant residents; and its reputation for street prostitution as well as drug haven for the city. For years it has been the renowned red light district of Barcelona, infamously known as ‘Barrio Chino’. The main objectives of the regeneration have been to change the neighbouroughs’ reputation, make it ‘safer’, less marginal, or as planners and politicians explain - to ‘normalise the area’.

One of the main strategies to achieve el Raval’s normalization was to create a cultural quarter in the northern part of the district. Linked to that is the opening of a great avenue, the new Rambla del Raval, through the middle area of the neighbourhood. This involves the demolition of the most dilapidated areas of housing and the eradication of the key areas of street prostitution. Moreover, the new avenue provides direct access to the cultural quarter. Through this physical re-design of the areas urban structure it is hoped to improve the public image of el Raval, as well as result in the absence of unwanted marginal social activities and people. However, initial findings show that these strategies have accentuated the internal segregation of the neighbourhood since the northern, mostly regenerated part of the neighbourhood, is known amongst residents as the “cultivated” Raval and the south as the “occult”.

My findings are based on an eight month ethnographic study which included fifty six interviews with old and new residents; new and old shop owners; workers in the new cultural establishments; resident associations; tourists; city council representatives; planners and architects². In this paper I focus on the flagship area of the regeneration process – ‘Eje Cultural’ (Cultural Quarter). From this area, one could argue, the regeneration was started and framed, has expanded and is expected to trickle down to surrounding areas.

In the next sections I will discuss some of my findings on the transformation of sensescapes in el Raval. I will first discuss the sensory physical contrast between the regenerated and non-regenerated. Then I will explore the sensory manipulation of time in regenerated spaces. Following that I will analyse the everyday practices in regenerated spaces, which will provide me with the framework to discuss the role of thresholds in public spaces in my last section.

A first encounter: contrast
In a regeneration process the contrast of different times and spaces is emphasized and very perceptible through the senses. A striking feature for the pedestrian is that neighbourhoods which are in the process of being regenerated, are strongly

¹ According to the 1996 census, 34,871 registered people live in this area which has the highest proportion of old people in Barcelona (27.8%), working class and immigrant population.
² To provide anonymity to the interviewees their names have been changed.
The changes in the neighbourhood are experienced at a physical level by residents as a clear move from a dark, dirty, cluttered neighbourhood to an experience of light and cleanliness. This experience is associated with a feeling of spaciousness, of openness that is undoubtedly linked to the demolition of housing, thus creating more open spaces, wider streets, the ordering of public space and linked to a perceived decrease of marginality by some residents. These changes are particularly noticeable in the cultural quarter in which tourists, art galleries, students and workers of the new cultural industries are an important feature of the everyday users. However, the ‘airing’ of the neighbourhood has meant that many residents have been re-housed and those who did not have legal proof of residence expelled. In interviews, planners, politicians and city council run housing associations positively associate the change of the sensory physiognomy of the neighbourhood with the normalisation of people living in it. Planners describe this action of opening up the neighbourhood as a necessary strategy to provide permeability of the place. El Raval needs the presence of the outside world for the social and public life of the place to change as the next two interview quotes from urban agents illustrate:

“That the outside walls are gone is as if the houses had opened their shells and you can see the soul of the neighbourhood, you can see how life really was inside all this.” (Nuria, artist)

When asked to remark on the changes that the regeneration has brought most long-term residents remark on el Raval’s past neglect. The neglect is often associated with the physical and sensory downgrading of the place over the pre-democratic years and the perception that the neighbourhood has little value for outsiders:

“There wasn’t anything here. In terms of cultural or citizen’s attractions, there wasn’t anything here. You had the Charity House but it was a big, rambling house. So old and bad smelling. It smelled old, like dirt, of abandonment, it was a long time abandoned.” (Juan, stationary shop owner, 40 years working in el Raval)

Hence, the changes in the neighbourhood are experienced at a physical level by residents as a clear move from a dark, dirty, cluttered neighbourhood to an experience of light and cleanliness. This experience is associated with a feeling of spaciousness, of openness that is undoubtedly linked to the demolition of housing, thus creating more open spaces, wider streets, the ordering of public space and linked to a perceived decrease of marginality by some residents. These changes are particularly noticeable in the cultural quarter in which tourists, art galleries, students and workers of the new cultural industries are an important feature of the everyday users. However, the ‘airing’ of the neighbourhood has meant that many residents have been re-housed and those who did not have legal proof of residence expelled. In interviews, planners, politicians and city council run housing associations positively associate the change of the sensory physiognomy of the neighbourhood with the normalisation of people living in it. Planners describe this action of opening up the neighbourhood as a necessary strategy to provide permeability of the place. El Raval needs the presence of the outside world for the social and public life of the place to change as the next two interview quotes from urban agents illustrate:

“Why this insistence on public space? Because public space resolves two problems in a neighbourhood that additionally to the narrowness of a historic city centre has a second problem: namely, that it has had the function of receiving the residual activities of the city for many years. The permeability, the facility of penetration by the exterior, for those who are outside the neighbourhood, for the rest of the city, the opening of the neighbourhood to the city was the principal worry in the first phase.” (Raval’s former councillor)

“It was a place in which the sun never entered, where there were no spaces for children to play well, and then they go through the neighbourhood and do other activities rather than play. What I mean is that these types of urban changes have a lot to do with improving the social set up of the place. It opens up for other social groups. Before, nobody wanted to live in the old city, and now we have changed it people like us are moving in. ...parallel with that goes the recuperation of all kind of

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3 This is a controversial issue as the council claims that crime has decreased in the area, whereas locals’ perceive an increase in crime. The disputes between residents and council have increased in recent months, as residents are taking justice into their own hands and organising resident patrols (see recent articles in La Vanguardia July, August 2000).
The building facades that have been given new uses: cultural or for research or universities. This also means a social change in terms of the uses of the neighbourhood, a neighbourhood that has certain buildings attracts certain kind of residents and users, offers more social permeability, helps to balance out the social life of the neighbourhood. Now there’s not only Lumpen there but also students. “(Urban Planner)

The flagship area of el Raval: the Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona (Macba) designed by Richard Meier and its surrounding Plaça dels Angels, sums up the envisaged sensory make up for regenerated space – lightness and spaciousness. The surfaces of the square are smooth and reflect the light, no trees or street furniture disrupts its uniformity, creates boundaries or distracts the senses from the self referential celebration of the place. People look small and lost in these squares, as the main attraction is the appearance of the place itself and reflections - reflections on the wet concrete pavement, reflections on the glass wall of the museum which could be described as a narcissistic urban landscape - a celebration of its own monumentality.

The aesthetic strategies applied make this square stand in sharp contrast with older, dirtier and more chaotic, non-regenerated spaces of the area. Beautiful in its own terms the flagship area is a public landmark of difference within the neighbourhood. It was created as a captivating landscape hoping to seduce the visitor on first sight with its visual qualities and formal arrangements, displaying a ‘visual imperialism’ (Edensor 1998), hence disregarding the provision of basic facilities to pause in the place. One could easily argue that this square and surrounding buildings could be anywhere and are interchangeable. It was conceived as a prestige object to attract investment and visitors to the place. This standardization of aesthetic strategies makes these kinds of spaces recognizable environments for tourists, which fits into Zukin’s (1995) description of commercialised spaces for visual consumption.

Opposed to this is the experience fostered by the backstage of el Raval. In the next quotes we can appreciate how new residents allude to the special character of the neighbourhood by referring to the sensescapes perceived when walking through its backstage. The particular neighbourhood feel, that makes it different from other spaces in the city, is palpable on the old non-regenerated streets. The closeness of buildings allow you to listen to the residents’ life above, the old shops, and the experience of places and people that do not exist in the rest of the city anymore. As a new resident remarks: “It has much more magnetism than other neighbourhoods.” Then continues:

“It comes from the narrow streets, from the old shops. It isn’t the same as a commercial neighbourhood. Here you can walk into a narrow street, I don’t know, it is like in the old times, you can sometimes go into some place and you are suddenly back in the 1960s. Also you have hidden places here, that nobody knows about, with the typical little bar. I just find el Raval a really nice place, but not well used and which hasn’t been treated well.” (Lucia, new resident, living 2 years in el Raval)

The sensory manipulation of time

In regenerated neighbourhoods the transformed is marked by an absence of the contrasting traces of time. From the planners view, regeneration projects try to create the ever present: old historic buildings are disposed of the physical traces of time and sandblasted to fit in with new designer features. As we can see in the Plaça dels Angels in el Raval, one side is bordered by non-regenerated poor 18th century terraced housing (which are partly hidden by a wall), opposite to it is the back of a sandblasted cloister and on the other side Richard Meiers luminescent white museum. Thereby referring both to the existent deprivation in the area and to the historic – religious past. Here the visual sense predominates and odours, sounds and tactile experiences are repressed. Visually, certain features had to be exalted while others are made invisible: what I define as a ‘designer heritage aesthetic’ is created.

The building facades that are maintained are factories, warehouses, schools and cloisters - all of which refer to an important historical or cultural past of the area. Sights or buildings that might evoke questions, that reflect social inequalities or echo uncomfortable memories such as abattoirs, working class housing, undesirable businesses such as brothels and cheaply made buildings with a weak infrastructure, are bulldozed over. Moreover, the recent past: el Raval’s social and physical decay in the 20th century are brushed away, and not referred to. One selective aspect of memory is imposed: the religious and industrial past. The conserved shells of history are filled with new functions: a church becomes a bookshop, the charity house a cultural institution. Spatially the grand historic landmarks and meanings are recovered and blended with 1990s sleek architectural-designer landmarks, often produced by famous architects.

As Bruner (1990) points out in his study of a reconstructed historic site in the USA: places are reinvented to conform to 1990s sensibilities. Today’s obsession with the past and sandblasted brickwork can be regarded as a reaction against the cosmopolitan and homogenizing impurities of modernism, reflecting, with its brick facades, vernacular architecture and national virtues (Samuel 1994). In addition there is a necessity to promote a forward looking spirit and controlled
development, as is visible in the new modern buildings and designed features of the place. The effects are twofold: on the one hand, creating a competitive image of the city will provide proof of the productivity of the city. Hence as Boyer states: “City images become essential in this marketing game: the kind of image that spatial pattern languages can foster and sell.” (1993:p.125) On the other hand new businesses located in these areas profit from the areas symbolic power as their location reflects knowledge of cultural values and enhances the company’s image as a young trend setting business. In el Raval, galleries, designer shops and antique shops are flourishing.

A further spatial consequence of subjecting these areas to a planned aesthetic framework is the relocation or closure of local businesses providing for a local population and the opening and attraction of new culture oriented businesses. My observation in el Raval suggests that the power of urban design in creating new spatial geographies has the consequence of more and more local shops closing down and being replaced by businesses providing for ‘outsiders’, especially on the regenerated access roads to the cultural quarter. The attraction of the museum and spatial re-arrangement of streets has created new walking patterns and a new public is coming into the area that does not need to buy their daily food in cluttered little shops. Simultaneously, the new waves of immigration from Morocco, Filipines and Pakistan are opening new businesses and gradually transforming el Raval into “Barcelona’s cultural Paella pan” (Time Out 2001), thus inscribing new meanings and practices in space.

The changes of shops and businesses attract different spatial practices and an increased gentrification in the use of space. Traditional street-life is being replaced by cafes, galleries, bookshops and designer stores that freeze organic public life and try to recreate it artificially - as I illustrate later, with planned events.

We can see in the above examples how aesthetic politics and urban design determine issues around inclusion and exclusion of “who belongs in specific places” (Zukin 1995) and consequently what sensuous experiences and spatial practices are encouraged. Furthermore, the uniform imposition of a ‘designer heritage aesthetic’ supports Zukin’s (1995) assumption that globalisation forces such as regeneration erase any authentic space in favour of reproduced, easily identifiable and increasingly homogenized space, thereby diminishing local identity.

The other side of the coin is, however, that while old, historical features have been smoothed out – painted, sandblasted to fit as heritage artefacts into the new aesthetic strategy, they can also be interpreted as important markers of time and memory in these places. It is the collage of these time indicators that marks the unique locality of these spaces, makes them visually distinguishable and identifiable with a particular place. The importance of these markers of time is that they connect places of the neighbourhood with imaginary spaces in the past. In the regenerated buildings we can often appreciate features that have been kept, almost untouched, to establish a link between past and present: in el Raval the plaque on a convent or a statue of the Virgin which residents often refer to when geographically describing the place.Maybe more relevant than their visual link to memory is their appeal as time markers to other senses, that help them to sign the place differently: for example the calming sound of the convent bells in the Plaça dels Angels. And cultural specific practices such as the brass bands marching through el Raval on Sundays symbolize the connection of places with locals. These features contradict and subvert the imposed visual order and are often recalled by people who live in these areas when describing the place. Hence one could argue that local contextual sensuous features and practices are important in attaching a particular identity to the place.

We can appreciate from these examples how the local translation of the global becomes representative of a place in a particular way. Although there is clearly a tendency towards a homogenisation of spatial aesthetics in regenerated public spaces, these become locally translated and adapted to the culture of the place and create a particular place identity.

**Everyday life: Practices in regenerated public spaces**

More pronounced is the juxtaposition of homogenised and specific local features, or local translation of global processes, in the practices and tactile experiences of space.

Around the area of the Macba one can frequently see groups from schools or individuals making drawings of the place; and the squares and adjacent landmarks are often chosen locations for professional film-teams or photography crews. The regenerated areas are extremely clean and a familiar sight is dustmen cleaning the place - in el Raval the almost daily cleansing of the walls from graffiti is especially pertinent and the most common sight is visitors constantly photographing the area. These practices can be linked to the argument of the predominance of the visual senses in the conception of place. The new public spaces have been conceived as places to gaze at and are used for visual practices by visitors.

However these spaces are linked to their surroundings and embedded in the everyday life of the surrounding neighbourhood. El Raval, as stated at the beginning, was a densely populated and housed neighbourhood already before the regeneration started. Hence, when one walks on the street of el Raval one is immediately immersed in it, part of it. The pedestrian weaves her way through the narrow streets, negotiating space with other people: young and old, Spanish, Moroccan, Filipinos on
their way to the market or to one of the many local grocery shops. A rich sensuous encounter, not only based on tactility, but moreover enhanced by the voices that fill the air; the music coming out from shops and balconies; the views into store and window displays. As interviewees highlighted, on a single street one can move from the smell of designer perfume, to the musty smell of second hand magazines and books, to the sweet smell of Pakistani cakes. Pedestrians are constantly challenged by beeping delivery vans wanting to park on the walkway, or Vespas brushing alongside them. Characteristic of the area is the amount of chance encounters occurring, especially amongst the old people greeting each other, stopping in door entrances for a chat and sitting on benches watching life pass by.

The regenerated square is a 'filtered' version of the neighbourhood's public life. On the one hand it is undoubtedly embedded in the neighbourhood and reflects, in a diminished manner, the everyday rhythms of the surrounding streets. Hence in the Plaça dels Angels in the morning old people use the museum slopes to take a rest on their way to their daily shopping and in the afternoon a cosmopolitan crowd of mothers and children play on the square after the adjacent school closes. Thus the Plaça dels Angels has been renamed by locals as "the square of the nations", symbolizing the importance of immigration on the character of the neighbourhood in recent years. However, the spatial dynamics of the square encourages mainly brief encounters, mostly based on sight, as the size of the space does not promote close interaction and minimizes bodily contact. Plaça dels Angels differs from traditional squares in that it does not have benches that invite the passer by to stay – it operates as a space of transit.

But what happens in el Raval at nighttime? The Plaça dels Angels is illuminated with blue-white lights, especially its architectural designer landmarks that rise spectacularly against the dark sky. The 'visual imperialism' is at its zenith; and as soon as the galleries, bookshops and cafes close and the cultural office workers leave their institutions, so-called 'undesirable' elements of the marginal Raval progressively take back the place. A few young people cross the square to visit bars; junkies, homeless people, drunkards, gypsies and recent immigrants take over the Plaça dels Angels and surrounding streets. Moroccan men meet on street-corners; local youths play football loudly, and young men race cars over the square. These sounds echo and take over the neighbourhood. Every morning new graffiti appears on the walls, sometimes only paintings, other times more political statements.

To counter these activities and the occupation of the space, the city council is turning to 'cultural animation' - free of charge. The city council is trying to control the nights in El Raval by promoting late opening hours for galleries, museums, bars, bookshops and organizing music events in the square and surrounding cafes. The basic idea being that, the more civilized activities are attracted to the area, the less space there will be for 'undesirable' activities. With these events the squares are filled with noise and stage lights, with crowds of people sit around watching the performed event. The illuminated buildings serve as a free stage set. The public space gets transformed into a performance space in which an artificial community is created, united by spectacle. The safe and controlled sensuous experience unites the crowd. Similar to Zukin’s (1995) account of an increasingly 'controlled and civilized' Bryant Park, catering for the middle classes, one can argue that:

"the cultural strategies chosen to revitalize [el Raval] carry with them the implication of controlling diversity while recreating a consumable vision of civility." (Zukin 1995:p.31)

These pacification strategies are used to conceal or remove 'undesirable' practices as much as 'sensuously polluting' features of place. Yet rather than removing the undesirable elements or homogenising these spaces to the visual imperative, what has been achieved, is the creation of an increasingly temporal and spatially segmented public life.

The role of thresholds in public places

In the above I have traced some of the organizing concepts of sensuous politics in regenerated public spaces in el Raval:

• the sensuous contrast of regenerated spaces in terms of the surrounding neighbourhood;
• the transformation of sensuous experiences in regenerated areas;
• the parallel existence of both homogenisation of spatial aesthetics and some practices linked to them, and the existence of localized spatial aesthetics and practices;
• the temporal and spatial segmentation of public life.

Do the above findings point out any specific characteristics of regenerated public spaces?

I believe that the most telling conclusions come when one considers the role of thresholds in public spaces. A threshold is as much a physical space as a socially and sensuously created space. It always links two places – the 'here' and the 'there', the private and the public. Bachelard evokes the meaning of thresholds in the "Poetics of Space":
“How concrete everything becomes in the world of the spirit when an object, a mere door, can give images of hesitation, temptation, desire, security, welcome and respect. If one were to give an account of all the doors one has closed and opened, of all the doors one would like to re-open, one would have to tell the story of one’s entire life.” (Bachelard 1996:p.224)

As the above quote points out, a threshold is a crucial space of transition, of space and time linking physical and imaginary spaces.

On entering regenerated areas for the first time, one is only aware of a distinct lack of these transitional spaces. Sensuously, as I have illustrated, regenerated and non-regenerated spaces stand in sharp contrast with each other. Regenerated streets, for example, are light, broad and straight and they have well defined boundaries for traffic, pedestrian and housing. Private space is constructed in clinically ordered lines ending abruptly at the pavement; there are no entrances or open spaces that provide transitions between public and private.

The narrow, uneven non-regenerated streets (usually back streets) do not have a separation for the different spatial practices. The street itself can be interpreted as a threshold for a number of varied activities. Houses facing these streets have often open doors from which one can hear what is happening inside and open yards, which blend private and public space. A local feature of the old houses in el Raval are the balconies from which washing is hung, open windows from which the attentive pedestrian can hear whole lives being performed. Yet many of the newly built flats do not have any balconies, hence private and public spaces are strictly separated. The inhabitants of these new buildings tend to subvert the designed environments and adjust them to their needs by using the little space available to personalize their balconies with plants, blinds and drying their washing wherever possible. Although the new streets are too broad to talk from one side to the other, people still greet each other by waving or try to talk to the next-door neighbour when looking out of the window.

Those voices more critical of the regeneration, such as self-organized resident groups, are cynical about the physical changes. They believe that the social problems have either been covered up or pushed out by creating designer environments - the real needs of place are pushed backstage, as the next quote illustrates:

“I believe that most of the times the trendiest designers and architects predominate but the reality is very different. When they made the floor of the square in front of the museum, the architect wanted the square to be like that, well, he should have known the neighbourhood before taking such a decision. The life in this barrio needs other things not so much design. ...It is very nice to have so much urban change, so many new streets but the problems are not in the buildings, the problems are with the people. I think that social politics is what they have invested in less, the only thing that counts here is money, not people.” (Patricia, shop owner and member of an alternative resident association)

Socially the lack of thresholds has the implication of annihilating ‘chance’ encounters, so important in the neighbourhood life of el Raval. What marks the non-regenerated areas is the possibility of chance encounters, of open doors and windows, of mixing public and private - of thresholds. This amongst other reasons is what also makes long term residents define el Raval as a ‘village within the city’. Similarly, most new residents remark how quickly they engage in small talk with people from diverse social backgrounds. For many people, especially newcomers, the sociability patterns make this neighbourhood more ‘authentic’ than other areas of the city. Albert, a new resident sums up:

“The features of el Raval refer to the broken, the marginal, the dirt. In Barcelona it has always been said that the not wanted are accepted in el Raval. And the charm of this neighbourhood is this, if you take this away, the magic it has disappears.”

(Albert, new resident, 4 years living in el Raval)

For newcomers this ‘marginality’ is regarded as charming, as an added ingredient to the authentic, bohemian character of el Raval, that is often referred to as ‘colourful’. However, one should not fall into the trap and romanticize the ‘old life’ in el Raval. Long term residents and people who have worked there for a long time have quite a different perception:

“You know all the stuff about ‘people are colourful’? People more than anything have a rash, have eczema, have ulcers, have caries, have toothache, lots of people don’t have any teeth, and people are lonely.... Yeah, of course it is ‘colourful’ but you can keep those colours for yourself; it sounds poetic but it is linked to a lot of suffering.” (Xavi, long term resident and charity worker)

To finish, let me come back to the Plaça dels Angels. The square - or open space - lacks entrances to buildings around it. Inside the museum or hotel it feels as if the outside is on show, framed by the windows: el Raval becomes an exhibit to gaze at. However, the museum and neighbourhood seem to be addressing two different worlds. As one artist describes el Raval:
“The museum I looked from, and the square I looked at, did not seem to meet at all. Although physical neighbours, they both seemed to address their own world.” (Fortuyn/O’Brien 1996:p.194)

In this case study we can clearly see that the physical and spatial arrangement of regenerated squares and streets do not promote the creation of sensuous and socially transitional spaces between the new and the existent, but tends to create boundaries both physically and socially. It is important to question what the social implications of transforming the sensescapes of public places are. What are the affordances permitted, evoked in contemporary re-designed public spaces? What are the predominant sensory rhythms? Which sensescapes are gradually excluded from public life? Which practices and memories of place?

Conclusion
This paper has illustrated the tensions that exist in regenerated public spaces - between the standardisation of aesthetic strategies and local contextual features and practices. Some of the findings of this paper point out that the manipulation of sensory regimes of the city are attempts to manage difference and homogenise the experience of these spaces. Once a marginal area, due to its sensory overload and linked perceptions of danger, el Raval is subjected to a spatial and architectural restructuring that tries to replace the existent sensory regime with a hygienic version that tells a selected history and might be found attractive to an outside audience. My findings point towards a homogenisation of visual practices linked to the regeneration of historic city centres, to conform to a ‘designer heritage aesthetic’ that is gradually transforming the sensuous experience of these places. However I have also indicated how the observation of these places, over time, has demonstrated that the sensuous imperatives of regenerated places are embedded in and subverted by local specific practices. Thus a homogenisation of the space is only achieved to some measure.

This research has been focused on a place that is still in the process of being regenerated, where the integrated vision and action has not reached all the corners of the neighbourhood. I wonder whether there will still be room for a variety of sensory experiences and different forms of public life, once the regeneration has been completed.

Note by the author: This text formed the basis of an oral presentation at the Barcelona Conference. A more extended version can be obtained from the author.

BIBLIOGRAPHY