

Strand 4. Research and Doctoral Thesis in Progress

Art Nouveau Murals and Logue Durée: From Ruskin's Grotesque to Street Art

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Abstract

The materiality of mural productions is explored from a *longue durée* perspective that considers the evolution of Ruskin's noble grotesque for this artistic expression from the Pre-Raphaelite to Street Art, in order to provide continuity, transformation and transmission for these aesthetic genealogies of Modernism through works of the Pre-Raphaelite, Gaudí, Mackintosh, Sullivan and Mucha that converged in shaping some of the principles of present day Street Art at Edward Everard's Printing House in Bristol, Maison Cauchie in Brussels and Casa Batlló in Barcelona. Finally, the developments of David Alfaro Siqueiros in Los Angeles and New York are considered as a result of his critical reception of Art Nouveau during his years in Europe.

Keywords: Art Nouveau, mural art, street art, grotesque, Modernism, rationalism, architecture

The production of mural art is one of the eldest cultural manifestations in the history of humanity. However, it may be said that throughout the 20th century the role of murals in the history of global Modernism was marginal and peripheral. Mural art is a phenomenon strongly dependent on architecture. Its materiality cannot be understood without the built structure of the wall, the roof, the vault, the dome. Although we normally tend to place Mural art inside architecture, however, its Latin etymology clearly refers to the external qualities of the wall. Both *muraglia* in Italian and *muralla* in Spanish and Catalan are a clear sample of this fact, since they refer concretely to a particular kind of defensive wall enclosing a city, a fort or a castle. Even when murals are produced inside an architecture, they are obviously placed at the most external material part of the wall: the surface. By following a *longue durée* approach,¹ this paper explores the internal and external qualities of murals in relation to changes and continuities within Modern Art with an emphasis on Art Nouveau productions that invites to think about the limits of Modernism. This archaeological approach drives to shape the particular genealogy of mural productions in Modern Art back to the Pre-Raphaelite from a critical consideration of their contextual dimensions or *contextuality*.²

The relationship with the Pre-Raphaelite and their definition as a starting point is not casual. It is done though on the crucial realms of technique. Although the Pre-Raphaelite are sometimes related to British Romanticism, their use of photography as a new expressive mean and part of the creative processes clearly reveals a Modern impetus which constitutes a significant rupture or qualitative leap with traditional uses of pictorial space. The use these British artists gave to photographs around 1850 in order to both compose and to study the optical qualities of their paintings allowed them to anticipate some of the ideas of Realism in landscape and representation,³ also to the crucial movement in Modern Art of Hyperrealism which will develop in the second half of 20th Century and still is relevant in the Art world. But the uses the Pre-Raphaelite gave to photography did not only anticipated Realism from the technique.

¹ Ferdinand BRAUDEL, "History and the Social Sciences: Longue Durée", *On History*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1980. Juan Antonio RAMÍREZ, *El Objeto y el Aura: (des)orden visual del arte moderno*. Madrid, Akal, 2009

² Lawrence GROSSBERG: "El corazón de los estudios culturales: Contextualidad, Construcciónismo y Complejidad", *Tabula Rasa*, 10, 2009, p. 13-48

³ Marcia WERNER, *Pre-Raphaelite Painting and Nineteenth-Century Realism*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Their use of photography was contextually and conceptually embedded into the social processes of industrialisation which may drive to characterise Modern Art too. The massive reproduction of images that emerged in parallel to this new technology was extremely powerful. It surpassed the affordances of engraving and started a clear visual revolution whose effects are nowadays more alive than ever.

The impact of photography in Modern Art was indeed not relegated to the pictorial space of paintings, its vast dimension becomes clear in William Morris's definition of architecture:

'La arquitectura comprende la consideración de todo el ambiente físico que rodea a la vida humana; y no podemos abstraernos a ella, mientras formemos parte de la comunidad civil, porque la arquitectura es el conjunto de las modificaciones y transformaciones introducidas en la superficie terrestre, en razón a las necesidades humanas, con la única excepción del puro desierto.'⁴

By including the Earth as an agent, Morris's definition turns architecture into landscape. It therefore is conceptually close to ecology,⁵ and fits more than ever some of the most urgent global needs of our 21st Century after decades and decades constructing islands of plastic, hills of rubber and meadows of useless electronic items. One may ask: where about is the relationship between photography and architecture in this holistic definition of architecture that is so close to ecology? Let us go to a library to illuminate this, the Oxford Union's, where Pre-Raphaelite painting became mural. We will find there wall paintings by Dante Gabriel Rossetti and six followers amongst which was Morris himself, whose hand on the ceiling is unmistakable (Plate 1.1). The work was done in 1855 when the library was a debating room,⁶ after John Ruskin proposed Rossetti to paint *Newton fathering pebbles on the Shore of the Ocean of Truth* at the interior of a place where new brilliant solutions of glass and iron architecture were developed to start a story that should bring Modern architecture to the highest skies from a new understanding of the Gothic revival. The place chosen by Ruskin was the Oxford University Natural Museum. Nevertheless, Rossetti rejected the commission

⁴ Mario MANIERI ELIA. *William Morris en la historia de la arquitectura*. Barcelona, Gustavo Gili, 1977, p. 110

⁵ James J. GIBSON, "The Theory of Affordances", in Shaw, R. y Bransford, J., eds., *Perceiving, Acting and Knowing*, Hillsdale, NJ, Erlbaum, 1977

⁶ John WHITELEY, *Oxford and the Pre-Raphaelites*, Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, 1989, p. 42

and painted Arthurian murals at the Union instead with tempera onto a dry ill prepared brick surface. At the core of this experimental groove there was the idea of the grotesque.

In general, the grotesque had been developing since the Renaissance as a Western aesthetic category where apparently contradictory entities gathered as a result of a creative impulse. John Ruskin developed his notion on the grotesque in *The Stones of Venice*, three books published between 1851 and 1853,⁷ right in the period when he got to know Rossetti's work in 1852.⁸ Ruskin related the moral decadence of an industrialised Great Britain to Venice's, where mechanical productivity and the division of labour had driven the relationship between work and worker to an end.⁹ For him, the imperfection of medieval objects was an evidence of humanity. He distinguished between several types of the Grotesque to place the noble grotesque at the highest peak of his aesthetic classification.¹⁰ For Ruskin, the noble grotesque was sincere in its deployment instead than artificial.¹¹ It produced a spiritual response after a feeling of awe resulting of fear which made it higher than laughter and horror.¹² His ideas, however, seemed not to clearly fit Rossetti's as the episode of the rejection of the topic on Newton demonstrates.

By the time when Morris had been working with Rossetti in Oxford, another Pre-Raphaelite, William Bell Scott, received a commission from Ruskin to paint murals in Northumberland.¹³ The murals were finished five years later, in 1860. They were conceived to be located on the blind arcade of the central cloister at Wallington Hall surrounding a sculpture by Thomas

⁷ McElroy, Bernard, 1989. *Fiction of the Modern Grotesque*. London: MacMillan Press; Frances Connelly, "The Stones of Venice. John Ruskin's Grotesque History of Art". In: Frances CONNELLY, ed., *Modern Art and the Grotesque*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 156-171

⁸ John WHITELEY, *Oxford...*, p. 42

⁹ Paul BARASCH. *The Grotesque: A study in meanings*. Paris, Mouton, 1971, p. 152-164; Geoffrey Galt HAPHAM. *On the Grotesque: Strategies of contradiction in art and literature*. Pirnceton: Princeton University Press, 1982, p. 145

¹⁰ Lucy HARTLEY. 'Griffinism, grace and all': the riddle of the grotesque in John Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, pp. 81-92

¹¹ Geoffrey Galt HAPHAM. *On the Grotesque...*, pp. 26-31, 183-188; Shelagh WILSON. 'Monsters and Monstrosities: Grotesque Taste and Victorian Design', In: Colin TRODD, Paul BARLOW and David AMIGONI, eds., *Victorian Culture and the Idea of the Grotesque*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 1999, pp. 143-159

¹² Frances CONNELLY, *The Grotesque in Western Art and Culture: the image at play*. Boadilla del Monte: Antonio Machado, 2015, pp. 41-44, 114, 295-303

¹³ Paul BARLOW. "Grotesque obscenities: Thomas Woolner's Civilization and its discontents". In: Colin TRODD, Paul BARLOW and David AMIGONI, eds., *Victorian Culture...*, pp. 97-109

Woolner entitled *Civilization*. The whole cycle should ‘epitomize and symbolize the values defining social development’, and the murals narrated the history of Northumbria from the building of Hadrian’s wall though to the industrial development of Tyneside.¹⁴ Their pictorial space was structured in similar terms than Ford Madox Brown’s *Work* by conflating the real with the grotesque as ‘a sign of the eruption of a productive dynamic which threatens and destabilizes the representation of social relations’¹⁵. That tension was highly evident at *Iron and Coal* (Plate 1.2), where the grotesque rises from a transitional space where both picturesque visions of nature and the transformative power of industry are brought together. This mural introduces an additional layer of realism to the work of some Pre-Raphaelite which overcomes technical aspects of representation to include also the represented content. In fact, that monumentalisation of the picturesque and the genre painting through the explicit depiction of labour and industry on a mural is in consonance with Courbet’s Realist manifesto. The whole setting, however, produced a sort of grotesque magical realism which can be clearly related to the grotesque in Dickens.¹⁶ Scott indeed pushed Courbet’s ideas further in turning its painting materially into architecture.

Although Ruskin painted some of the floral motives on the wall frames of Wallington House, he felt a certain bewilderment after Scott’s explicit depiction of the grotesque. It was William Morris who was to develop later the admiring dimension of Ruskin’s noble grotesque onto the grounds of industrialisation. He did so through dignifying labour and collective organisation.¹⁷ In this case, awe rises after the capacity of producing and sustaining collective work, to the extent of providing income to and benefiting a considerable amount of people. This idea of the virtues of labour that were developed by Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement were, in fact, heavily influential in configuring the Bauhaus.¹⁸ The cathedral metaphor thus expanded specially to design and also to the new art of film.¹⁹ It is a crucial

¹⁴ Paul BARLOW. “Grotesque obscenities...”, p. 99

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Michael Hollington. “Ironic Infernos: *Black House*, *Hard Times* and Ruskin’s Conception of the Grotesque”. *Dickens and the Grotesque*, London: Croom Helm, 1984, pp. 193-212

¹⁷ Linda GERTNER ZATLIN. “Medievalism and Aestheticism”. *Beardsley, Japonisme and the Perversion of the Victorian ideal*. Cambridge, Cambridge, University Press, 1997, pp. 40-47

¹⁸ Mario MANIERI ELIA. *William Morris*..., p. 92

¹⁹ David BORDWELL and Kristin THOMPSON. *Minding movies: observations on the art, craft and business of filmmaking*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2011

feature to understand how the noble grotesque configured a particular genealogy which is at the foundations of Modernism.

The grotesque had an actual important presence in the work developed by the Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí from his beginnings. He was a reader of Ruskin.²⁰ Moreover, as it occurred with the Pre-Raphaelite, his production was, in fact, very influenced by the new medium of photography.²¹ Gaudí did not write much.²² His contribution to the history of Modern architecture was more visual than textual, both in the processes of learning and sharing his experimental developments. Closely in relation with Morris ideas on the organisation of labour, he developed the parabolic arch at the Cooperativa Obrera in Mataró in 1878. He did it with simple materials, brick, wood and glass, after having studied the Mediterranean Gothic, in which flying buttresses were suppressed externally in order to develop internal structural solutions that produced wide spaces with ships of uniform height, also known as *hallenkirchen*. He considered the technical solutions of the style were unfinished, so by merging the rounded and the pointed arches into the hybrid shape of the parabolic one he found the solution to complete it. In 1882, when the works at Mataró finished he took the responsibility of the ones at the temple that was being built in the Eixample at Barcelona dedicated to the Holy Family. He took the commission when the crypt had already been built in a Gothic Revival fashion and modified the project to include his hybrid structural achievements that considerably increased the building's height thanks to the mathematic potential of the parabola that was also the result of a conscientious observation of the natural world, especially the hives as they are started to be built by bees in the beginning.²³

Next works by Gaudí developed the grotesque in this hybrid intercultural dimension to include Orientalism. If the Gothic was important in shaping the grotesque in mid-nineteenth century Britain from an internal perspective and to inaugurate the field of medieval studies, the external dimension of the phenomenon should be found in a more and more Oriental

²⁰ Henry-Russell HITCHCOCK. *Arquitectura de los siglos XIX y XX*, Madrid, Cátedra, 1998, p. 304

²¹ Juan José LAHUERTA, *Universo Gaudí*. Madrid y Barcelona, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

²² Joan BASSEGODA, "The Personality of Antoni Gaudí". In: Patrick NUTGENS, ed., *Mackintosh & His Contemporaries in Europe and America*

²³ Juan Antonio RAMÍREZ. *La metáfora de la colmena: de Gaudí a Le Corbusier*. Madrid, Akal, 1998

influence in the arts that consolidated specially after Japan opened itself to the world in 1854. Japonisme was crucial in the development of the Arts and Crafts movement, both aesthetically and technically.²⁴ Flat fields of colour of the Japanese tradition of illustration were soon adopted by Owen Jones in his wallpapers and they are also evident in his encyclopaedic approach to design at *The Grammar of Ornament* in 1856. There he included large repertoires of Spanish medieval art like the geometrical patterns of the Alhambra that he had studied in the previous decade. His interpretation of the geometry and colour of the tile mural compositions of the Nasrid palace can be considered a clear precedent of the aesthetics of Japonisme that came to set the linear style of Art Nouveau, as it will be referred later. A similar mural abstract conception of wall surfaces is found in Pre-Raphaelite Italy, being the marble façade designed by the Genoese architect Leone Battista Alberti at Santa Maria Novella the clearest example. Alberti inspired himself in the Romanesque to conceive the façade, which illustrates his ideas on the importance of ornament in architecture and its public function.²⁵ All these notions, besides the work of Viollet-Le Duc on bones and French vernacular architecture,²⁶ were strongly present in the works developed by Gaudí for the banker Antonio López, marquis of Comillas, and the patron Eusebi Güell in a general Spanish context of colonial decline, urban growing and industrial recession that came to ‘morally counterpose the traditional ethic of work to the new aesthetics of consumption’, by opening a situation in which ‘the grotesque’ was ‘in the megalomania of the new rich’.²⁷ That context was particularly evident in the Barcelona’s 1888 Universal Exhibition in Barcelona, a crucial event in the making of Catalan *Modernisme*.

Those works developed by Gaudí between 1882 and 1888 gathered both Eastern and Western Orientalism, the Romanesque and vernacular architecture besides his interpretation of Gothic on Morris’s understanding of the noble grotesque. They gave place clearly to *pastiche* architectures where historicism was still deeply present in a fragmentary fashion similar to the

²⁴ Linda GERTNER ZATLIN. *Beardsley, Japonisme and the Perversion...*

²⁵ Anthony GRAFTON. *Leon Battista Alberti: master builder of the Italian Renaissance*, New York, Hill and Wang, pp. 152-153,

²⁶ Juan José LAHUERTA, *Universo Gaudí...*, p. 27

²⁷ Juan José Lahuerta, “Burgueses y señores. Verdaguer, Gaudí y la producción simbólica de la alta burguesía barcelonesa”. *Antonio Gaudí 1852-1926: Arquitectura, ideología y política*, Milano, Electa, 1992, p. 7

logic described by Jameson in his theories on late capitalism.²⁸ By 1888, however, the Catalan architect received a commission to finish a project for a nuns convent and school in Sant Gervasi located at the outskirts of Barcelona: the Teresian College,²⁹ where he abandoned historicism in order to focus on a personal interpretation of Spanish vernacular architecture developed in the kingdoms of Castille and Aragon in parallel to the Romanesque when the latter kingdom increased its *colonial* presence in Greece. The style, which is though confusedly known as Moorish or *Mudéjar*,³⁰ develops a pictorial understanding of surfaces which resemblances Byzantine and Eastern European architectures and combines them with both Romanesque and Umayyad features. Within this intercultural style, one of the most definitional techniques are the combinations of wide lines of irregular stones framed by rows of bricks and packed with ram or cement which is known as *aparejo Toledano*. In the Teresian College, Gaudí employed creatively this particular technique with no clear historicist references, but his personal hybrid achievement of the catenary arch and a series of corbel arches in the façade which may be linked to the rise of primitivism in Modern Art, as they were used in Neolithic and Bronze Age architecture and also in architectural systems still to be valued and discovered by Western historiography like, for instance, Mayan or Khmer buildings (Plate 2.1). Those abstract mural compositions where both bricks and stone are combined as ornament were translated into pristine white corridors to the interior of the building which clearly anticipate a rationalist, almost minimal, conception of space. Let us not to forget Le Corbusier considered Gaudí to be one of the fathers of Modern Architecture.³¹ The College was topped with a line of battlements. Each one reproduced the structure of corbel arches in the highest part of the building with no other function than austere symbolising Theresa of Avila and her book *The Interior Castle*.

²⁸ Frederick JAMESON. El postmodernismo o la lógica cultural del capitalismo tardío. Barcelona: Paidós

²⁹ E. CASANELLES. *Nueva visión de Gaudí*. Barcelona: La polígrafa, 1965, p. 45-48

³⁰ Juan Carlos RUIZ SOUZA. “Castilla y Al-Andalus. Arquitecturas aljamiadas y otros grados de asimilación” *Anuario del Departamento de Historia y Teoría del Arte*, 21, 2004, pp. 17-43; Gonzalo M. BORRÁS GUALIS. “Granada, Canarias y América: Las pervivencias artísticas mudéjares en la Edad Moderna”, p. 231-241 y Manuel RUZAFÁ GARCÍA, “En torno al término “mudéjar”. Concepto y realidad de una exclusión social y cultural en la Baja Edad Media”, p. 19-25 En: *Mudéjares y moriscos, cambios sociales y culturales: actas*, Teruel, Centro de Estudios Turolenses, 2004

³¹ LE CORBUSIER. *Gaudí*. Barcelona, Polígrafa, 1957

One year later, in 1891, William Morris reprinted John Ruskin's chapter "The Nature of Gothic" from *The Stones of Venice*.³² By then Ruskin had become the prophet of the Arts and Crafts movement, partly because of his fusion of political and artistic theory. Also that year, Mackintosh expended some time in Italy studying the architecture and he produced a drawings and watercolours, some of which are close to the thorough visual studies that Ruskin elaborated for *The Stones of Venice*. The travel included the regions of Tuscany, Emilia-Romana and Venice, but only his drawings for Lombardy and Verona are known.³³ His virtuous studies on grotesque details of architecture like his depiction of a blinded window at the main façade of the Charterhouse of Pavia certainly remind Ruskin's (Plate 2.2). When he returned to Glasgow, one year later in 1892 Mackintosh included these sort of decorations profusely in his project for the Glasgow Art Galleries and Museum at Kelvingrove for the Honeyman & Keppie studio (Plate 2.3). The project however was criticised by arguing the blind windows lacked functionality for an art gallery and he was then invited to deliver two papers on architecture to the artistic circles of Glasgow.³⁴ He defended the ornament in windowless walls by stating that 'to have openings for no use but effect would be to construct the decoration not decorate the construction'.³⁵ It can be deduced from this that most likely the light was coming from above the building, in a similar fashion than Oxford University Museum. By following Ruskin, Mackintosh also defended the organic nature of Gothic architecture as a sample of rationalism that functioned beyond the formal plans of buildings.³⁶ In his next lecture in 1893 'he observed how absurd it was to see modern churches, theatres, banks, museums, exchanges, municipal buildings, art galleries, etc in the form of Greek temples',³⁷ and he appealed to painters ending with a plea for originality – 'magic' – the idea of beauty in the artist's own mind, not the servile imitation of nature of 'small-minded men', the quality which takes 'architecture above building and painting beyond paint.'³⁸ Later in 1895 Mackintosh began experimenting with a vernacular-based architecture following a similar ethnographic impulse than Gaudí's. He seemed to abandon

³² David WALKER. "Mackintosh on Architecture". In: Pamela ROBERTSON, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Architectural Papers*. Glasgow, White Cockade, 1990, p. 154

³³ <http://www.mackintoshsketchbook.net/northern_italy.php> Consulted on 15/05/2018

³⁴ David WALKER. "Mackintosh...", p. 154-156

³⁵ David WALKER. "Mackintosh...", p. 156

³⁶ David WALKER. "Mackintosh...", p. 160

³⁷ David WALKER. "Mackintosh...", p. 171

³⁸ David WALKER. "Mackintosh...", p. 172-173

his ideas on the Gothic ornament as it is shown by the main façade he conceived for the Glasgow School of Art that was started to be built in 1897 (Plate 2.4). The only remains of the Gothic revival there were the hand basket arch at the central section and the perpendicular frameworks of the large masses of windows that clearly started to reduce the walls as a result of a rational conception of architecture which is extremely close to Modernism. Not far from the principles of Gothic, however, the mural qualities of architecture became crystal.

Going back to 1891, the same year that Mackintosh was travelling in Italy, Henry Louis Sullivan anticipated the ideas of European rationalism in Chicago through an approach that was directly driven towards painterly mural art when he projected the Odd Fellows Fraternity Temple Building in the last few months of 1891 (Plate 3.1).³⁹ The massive structure was planned to become the tallest in the world from a skilful shift in methodology that allowed him to reach skyward practically without limitation. The project was concentrated around a giant volume broken up into a largely symmetrical series of blocks, culminating in a central tower. At street level, four entries were aligned symmetrically, emphasized by broad, semicircular splayed arches. However, the project was not carried out due to several reasons.⁴⁰ Next year, Sullivan developed an entrance similar to the four projected at the Temple Building in the Golden Doorway of the Transportation Building. This work was finished in October 1892 as an ephemeral architecture for the fair the US organised to celebrate the 400 anniversary of Columbus discovery of America. The building was thought to be treated externally in thirty different colours, but many large plain surfaces were left to receive the final polychrome treatment. Named the Golden Doorway, the entrance consisted ‘of an immense single arch enriched with carvings, bas-reliefs, and mural paintings... for it is treated entirely in gold-leaf’ (Plate 3.2).⁴¹ The only architect from the western coast of North America at the fair, Sullivan considered that the emphasis on historicism of his eastern colleagues pushed backwards the development of American architecture in more than thirty years. In consequence, his pictorial conception of the building provided a critical counterpoint to that colonial celebration of Western modernity. By doing so, he clearly anticipated the ideas of Modern mural art.

³⁹ Mario MANIERI ELIA. *Louis Henry Sullivan*, New York, Princeton Architectural Press, 1996, p. 89-99

⁴⁰ Mario MANIERI ELIA. *Louis Henry Sullivan...*, p. 89-90

⁴¹ Mario MANIERI ELIA. *Louis Henry Sullivan...*, p. 91

Sullivan's understanding of the grotesque in this sense was close to William Morris and the ethic impulse of the Arts and Crafts,⁴² not only to include all the processes for the structural making of the building but also to expand collective work to a markedly mural ornamentation. As it happened with Gaudí and the Gothic, it can be suggested that his was a creative gaze to Romanesque architecture. It was through the basic volumes of Romanesque and post-Roman architecture indeed that he went to develop the skyscraper supported by the new materials. His Golden Doorway was turned into a Modern narrative portal to transmit the values of American heritage to a relatively young nation. Moreover, his critique to historicism and the classical tradition was far from Gaudí's ahistorical *pastiches* but it included his Modernist-primitivist gaze through a relatively positive archaeological understanding of architecture. The profusion in the use of mural polychromy and pictorial story-telling is a clear symptom of it, since both were originally present on buildings during the medieval period in Europe. Sullivan's primitivism was therefore the result of an empirical internal critique to tradition that is symbolically close to Insular art. But Sullivan's conception of polychrome murals at the Transportation Building can also be seen as an ethnographic claim for the visual cultures of indigenous and marginalised peoples from the west coast and the rest of North America. Both historicist and anti-classical, Sullivan's provided a grotesque understanding of architecture that may be related to the social realism as it was defined by O'Connor to established the grotesque as an American genre.⁴³ By 1893, the interest of the Paris Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Sullivan's work,⁴⁴ announced winds of change in the role which America was about to play for the development of Modernism in the next decades.

Symbolism, primitivism and the Romanesque were all present at the work of Paul Gauguin that Childs relates to the 'ethnographic grotesque'.⁴⁵ Like Don Quixote,⁴⁶ Gauguin left his established life looking after the Rousseauian belief of ideal natures of men and women living

⁴² Lauren S. WINEGARDEN. *Louis H. Sullivan: The Banks*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987, p. 19-21

⁴³ William van O'Connor. "The Grotesque, an American Genre". In: *The Grotesque: An American Genre and other essays*. Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1962, 3-19

⁴⁴ Mario MANIERI ELIA. *Louis Henry Sullivan...*, p. 99

⁴⁵ Elizabeth C. CHILDS. "Eden's Other, Gauguin and the Ethnographic Grotesque". In: Frances CONNELLY. *Modern art...*, p. 175-186

⁴⁶ Henry W. SULLIVAN. *Grotesque Purgatory: A Study of Cervantes's Don Quixote, Part II*. University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996, p. 50

in preindustrial society and shared the results of his displacement in Paris in order to ‘confuse and destabilize boundaries between European ideas of modern and civilized on the one hand, and “primitive” and exotic on the other, by creating new hybrids of the ideal and the real, the beautiful and the ugly, the familiar and the strange, the modern and the anti-modern.’⁴⁷ He followed three different procedures of the grotesque that may apply to any model of the ethnographic grotesque: (i) a combinatory mode which takes disparate and unlike entities, and force them into a new union, as in bricolage or collage;⁴⁸ (ii) a metamorphic mode in which one substance or being mutates or transforms into another; and (iii) a deformative or aberrant mode in which forms degenerate or become ugly, exaggerated or misshapen. Gauguin put all these modes at work within his context both internally in Brittany and externally in Tahiti. Moreover, he experienced this very same idea through his cosmopolitan life in Paris at the Crèmerie of Madame Charlot Caron,⁴⁹ where he used to interact with Scandinavian artists Ida Erikson and William Molard, his Norway brother-in-law Frits Thallow, also the Norwegians Christian Krogh and Edvard Munch, the Swedish August Strindberg and Carl Milles, the Finish Pekka Halonen and Vaino Blomstedt and the British Frederick Delius. All of them contributed to shape a sort of ethnographic grotesque by performing their cosmopolitanism in Paris throughout their intercultural encounter. The figures who contributed most to the development of our object of study – murals – at the Crèmerie were not Nordic but Eastern Europeans. They are the Czech Alfons Mucha and Waldyslaw Slewinski, the Polish who also frequented the Crèmerie besides his compatriots Stanislaw Przybyszewski and Jozef Mehoffer.

In 1890, Both Mucha and Slewinski did a crucial contribution in providing a new understanding of mural art in relation to the public space of Montparnasse when they painted the metallic front of the Crèmerie in Art Nouveau style (Plate 3.3). One of the panels represented a Parisian woman dancing with a palette on her hand, most likely Madame Caron. There, the inscription “La Purée Artistique” alluded both to the food of the poor and the artists’s, who lived a bohemian life of misery and were allowed to pay their meals there with

⁴⁷ Elizabeth C. CHILDS. “Eden’s... 182

⁴⁸ Elizabeth C. CHILDS. “Eden’s... 182

⁴⁹ Jean-Didier WAGNEUR. “La vida bohemia: una mitología del siglo XIX”. In: Sylvain AMIC and Pablo JIMÉNEZ BURILLO, eds., *Lucas de bohemia: artistas, gitanos y la definición del mundo moderno*, Paris, Fundación MAPFRE, 2012, p. 89-90

designs or paintings that also covered the Crèmerie's internal walls. This pictorial movement from the interior of architecture towards the exterior should be considered one of the most evident precedents of many Graffiti and Street Art pieces as they are nowadays defined by specialists.⁵⁰ This understanding specially comes out of the external material contextuality of the artworks, which are directly produced to be part of the urban landscape. It was contemporary to the first posters produced by Toulouse-Lautrec and so to the domination of the advertising industry, as a critical response or *resistance* to it in a similar fashion than present day Street Art.⁵¹

In the next years, Mucha himself would experience an ambivalent position between the two types of grotesque that came after Morris and we introduced earlier in relation to Gaudí's production: the megalomaniac *pastiche* driven towards consumption, and the Modernist-primitive which resemblances Gauguin's ethnographic, where most likely Ruskin's noble grotesque could be found. His production at the core of the imperial metropolis of Paris, however, led to a paradoxical situation. His crafted, handmade works were to become exclusive luxury items, far from the democratic aims stated by Morris in his theory of design, while his massively reproduced posters contributed to a shift in theatre to industrial ways of doing. Mucha became best known by his portraits of the actress Sarah Bernhardt on posters advertising her plays through grotesque motifs that fused Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics with Japonisme and his Eastern Byzantine and Slavic folk traditions.⁵² Moreover, he included in the creative processes recent developments in the areas of psychology and psychiatry like the suggestive power of hypnosis that was detected in consumers when they made choices in 'a somnambular state of semiconsciousness' motivated to 'an important degree by the desire to acquire prestigious symbols'.⁵³

He became famous with the poster for *Gismonda* (Plate 3.4), that was up all over Paris on the morning of January 1, 1895 on cylindrical posts planted at intervals on the sidewalks, so

⁵⁰ Marta WACKLAWECK, *Street Art and Graffiti*. London, Thames & Hudson, 2011.

⁵¹ Carlo MCCORMICK, Ethel SENO, Marc SCHILLER, Sara SCHILLER and BANKSY. *Trespass: a history of uncomissioned urban art*, Köln, Taschen, 2015

⁵² Victor ARWAS, Jana BRABCOVÁ-ORÍOVÁ and Anna DVORÁK, 1998. *Alphonse Mucha, The Spirit of Art Nouveau*. London: Yale University Press: 12-21

⁵³ Victor ARWAS, Jana BRABCOVÁ-ORÍOVÁ and Anna DVORÁK, 1998. *Alphonse Mucha...*, 14

pedestrians were suddenly confronted by virtually life-size figures of Sarah.⁵⁴ Three years later he designed the poster for *Medée* (Plate 3.5), where Sarah Bernhardt was portrayed in a terrific grotesque fashion with a serpent-shaped golden bracelet that led the jeweller Fouquet to commission Mucha the design of his boutique in 1898 (Plate 3.6). For the storefront Mucha conceived ‘essentially a sign intended to draw the attention of passer-by’ through its articulation around a figure of a woman playing with jewels that translated into sculpture his posters’,⁵⁵ that was elaborated aesthetically close to Rodin’s *Gates of Hell*. The woman was surrounded by painted glasses and panels with wide galvanized copper volutes and metallic motifs in deep relief. Both later Sarah Bernhardt theatre company and Mucha’s trips to the USA were important in spreading the Parisian ethnographic style of Art Nouveau overseas. His spectacular depictions of the actress without no doubt anticipated the future star system of the new art of cinema, where Morris’s ideas on collective work and the cathedral were to be developed at the start of 20th Century.⁵⁶

All these ideas converged and merged in 1900 when the architect Henry Williams designed the headquarters of the Printing Works of Edward Everard in Bristol (Plate 4.1). Everard was a founder member of the Bristol Master Printer’s and Allied Trades’s Association in a context when books, periodicals and specially advertising had massively boosted the market. But Everard view of printing was beyond business. He was a follower of William Morris and the press he established in 1891, Kelmscott Press, so he considered printing as craft. The whole headquarters at 38 Broad Street comprised an irregular urban space that also had an entrance on John Street. The main façade, however, was a narrow vertical space surrounded by other properties. Everard commissioned Williams to design a pictorial composition that was full of symbolism. The architect did it on a structure of three floors and a regular triangular tympanum. Initially the composition was going to be related to the city’s history with dragons and Celtic motifs. But when William James Neatby was ordered to decorate the façade at the ceramic workshop he was working in, he changed the whole program. His design was a composition on tile work with rich colours that was made in 1903 at Harrods food hall. He adapted to both the Arts and Crafts ideas and their translation into a new art, the Art Nouveau,

⁵⁴ Victor ARWAS, Jana BRABCOVÁ-ORIOVÁ and Anna DVORÁK, 1998. *Alphonse Mucha...*, p. 68, 142

⁵⁵ Victor ARWAS, Jana BRABCOVÁ-ORIOVÁ and Anna DVORÁK, 1998. *Alphonse Mucha...*, p. 124

⁵⁶ David BORDWELL and Kristin THOMPSON. *Film Art: An Introduction*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1993

that were the interests of Everard. Thus the façade came to be an allegory of the history of printing with portraits of Guttenberg and William Morris surrounding the Spirit of Light, who spread glorious wings over twin arched windows on which it is written Edward Everard's name. The whole composition was crowned by a massive female figure holding a lamp and mirror as symbols of light and truth.⁵⁷ By 1900, the linear style of Art Nouveau developed in Paris had reached a continental scope. In Britain, the controversial work of Audrey Beardsley had brought that style further and became influential even after he died in 1898 when he was only 26 years old.⁵⁸ Neatby followed this dominant style and originally reinterpreted it on a façade, bringing it beyond posters and illustrations. The full composition was done on tiles as in some of Gaudí's buildings, but in Bristol tiles were parts of a larger pictorial unity rather than isolated symbols or geometric abstractions, in a sense that had a clear precedent in Sullivan's Golden Doorway. The use of rounded arches besides hand basket ones also recalled Mackintosh reinterpretations of British vernacular architecture that in Everard's found the grotesque ornaments that the Scottish reserved for interiors at his major mural productions, where he synthesised both Japonisme, the Parisian linear style of Art Nouveau and a Celtic sense of ornament. *The Wassail* was exhibited as a portable mural in Vienna at the Secession in 1900 besides works by his wife Margaret Macdonald.

Let us slightly consider two more remarkable Art Nouveau examples that followed Edward Everard's pictorial understanding of the façade and transformed it through different techniques. They both happened around 1905 in Brussels and Barcelona. On the one hand, the architect Paul Cauchie and her wife the painter Lina Voet designed together the façade of their house next to the Cinquenaire Park (Plate 4.2).⁵⁹ They followed an approach that combined a structural visual language close to Victor Horta with the aesthetic renovation of linear Art Nouveau carried out by the Mackintosh. The whole pictorial work was contained into two framed spaces over and below a balcony that opened a window on a horseshoe arch. Nine female figures were distributed in the two spaces by alluding to the Muses of Greek Mythology. The inferior register, right under the arch, separated two twin windows with a

⁵⁷ Jean Manco, "Edward Everard's Printing Works" *Bristol Magazine*, December 2007 (retrieved online, <http://www.buildinghistory.org/bristol/everards.shtml>, 16/12/2018)

⁵⁸ Linda GERTNER ZATLIN. *Beardsley, Japonisme...*

⁵⁹ Françoise AUBRY, Jos VANDENBREEDEN and France VANLAETHEM. *L'architecture en Belgique – Art nouveau, art déco & modernisme*, Brussels, Racine, 2006, p. 200

figure rising her arms and the motto “Pour nous” – “for us” – the other eight figures were depicted with their attributes on the considerably larger pictorial surface on the window. All of them were done through sgraffito, a technique that combined both etching and painting with the procedures of fresco and printing. The technique was used both in Spain and Italy during the Middle Ages. On the other hand, in Barcelona, we find Gaudí collaborating with Josep Maria Jujol at the façade of Casa Batlló at the Gràcia Walkway (Plate 4.3).⁶⁰ They created there a fully coloured pictorial composition through a technique that combined both tile and glass to shape a mosaic in an unusual way that announces the abstraction of Modern art. Within the mosaic, the first collage in Europe,⁶¹ most of the colourful glass and pottery tesserae were broken pieces rescued and reused after their waste. This procedure is known as *trencadís* and its use was also emblematic at the Park Güell in Barcelona. There the materials surpass the agency of the architect to dominate them, as in a *vanitas*, as in putrefaction.⁶² These informal qualities were undoubtedly crucial for the Surrealists who first included Gaudí in the discourse of Modern Art in an article written by Dalí at *Le Minotaure* with Man Ray’s photographs in 1933.⁶³ They have been recently related to ecological and social issues.⁶⁴

There was however, a clear manifesto that referred to mural art two years before the Surrealist manifestos, when Miró barely mounted his first exhibit in Paris, in 1921. Its title is “Three calls of present orientation for the painters and sculptors of the new American generation”.⁶⁵ It was written in Spanish and published in Barcelona by David Alfaro Siqueiros, a young revolutionary painter who had been living in Barcelona and Paris and travelled to Brussels and Italy since 1919 thanks to a grant of the Mexican Government. Siqueiros undoubtedly saw Gaudí and Cauchie murals years after the construction of the buildings on which they are located, and he experienced the power of advertising at the commodified urban landscapes of those cities. In his manifesto he referred to Picasso, Sunyer, Juan Gris and a group of

⁶⁰ E. CASANELLES. *Nueva visión...* p. 74-77

⁶¹ E. CASANELLES. *Nueva visión...* p. 75

⁶² Juan José LAHUERTA. *Antoni Gaudí...*, p. 316-331.

⁶³ Salvador DALÍ. “De la beauté terrifiante et comestible de l’architecture modern style” *Le Minotaure*, 2-4, 1933, p. 69-76; Ver el desarrollo de estas ideas en Wolfgang KAYSER. *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 169-174; André CHASTEL, *El Grotesco*. Madrid: Akal, 1996; Beatriz FERNÁNDEZ RUIZ. *De Rabelais a Dalí. La imagen grotesca del Cuerpo*. Valencia, Universitat de Valencia, 2004

⁶⁴ ALBERTO ÁLVAREZ AURA, *La huella escatológica: metáforas del excremento y el residuo en el espacio social*, Barcelona, Laertes, 2013

⁶⁵ David Alfaro SIQUEIROS. *L’art et la révolution*, Paris, Editions Sociales, 1973, p. 23-26

Spaniards, mostly Catalans, who were freeing themselves of the power of tradition. Like Sullivan, he considered that “le peinture mural est en premier lieu un problème de complementation architectonique”,⁶⁶ but unlike him, he called to adopt the synthetic energy of the African and American indigenous arts without “lamentables reconstructions archéologiques (*indianisme, primitivisme, américanisme*)”.⁶⁷ He followed the path opened by the Pre-Raphaelite in using photography in his creative processes both as a mean of composing and documenting the processes.⁶⁸ Moreover, he went further to develop a cinematic understanding of mural art in relation to architecture, that was clearly connected both to Futurism and the new art of cinema. In fact, Sergei Eisenstein was his friend in Mexico. Siqueiros was a polemist who was expelled out of several countries like Spain, Mexico, the USA and Argentina.

His most relevant contributions to Modernism were technical innovations,⁶⁹ as well as the practice of what he called ‘*pintura mural y esteriora*’,⁷⁰ which is a relevant definitional feature for present-day Street Art. He did those developments in 1932 in Los Angeles at the *Chouinard School of Art* during a period of exile.⁷¹ After decades painting murals with the fresco technique, the only wall he found there was external, so he needed to accelerate the pictorial process in order to adapt to the faster drying of the cement. It was this way he introduced aerographs and paint sprayers into the art discourse long before the spraycan was invented. He also engineered the use of metal and celluloid stencils in order to resist the impact of the pigments, by anticipating the art of Banksy or Blek le Rat. Moreover, Siqueiros introduced the context itself as a dimension of the artwork, a clear characteristic of Street Art, by adapting the figures to the structure of architecture and also by choosing a ‘Workers’ Meeting’ as a topic in the midst of the economic depression (Plate 4.4). In the mural a group of workers interrupted their works and watched through the sections of the building they are working in in order listen an agitator surrounded by a black man and a white woman holding

⁶⁶ David Alfaro SIQUEIROS. *L’art...*, p. 37

⁶⁷ David Alfaro SIQUEIROS. *L’art...*, p. 26

⁶⁸ Rita EDER, dir., *Siqueiros en la Mira*. México D.F.. Museo de Arte Moderno, 1996, p. 19

⁶⁹ Laurance P. HURLBURT. *The Mexican muralists in the United States*. Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1989, p. 7-8

⁷⁰ Mario DE MICHELI, *Siqueiros*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, 1968, p. 10

⁷¹ Raquel TIBOL, *Siqueiros: introductor de realidades*, México DF, UNAM, 1961, p. 53

a child. The painting was erased the next year but it was successful. More than 800 people went to its uncovering. Siqueiros got then a commission to paint a large mural (30x9m) on 'Tropical America' at a highly visible setting in front of The Art Plaza Center thanks to the sponsorship of a paint sprayers company.⁷² The surface was not a façade, but the empty space available on a dividing wall between two buildings of different height, which was to become also a common feature of Street Art murals. He used then the electric projector to transfer the design to the wall and brushes to refine the aerograph's texture. He did a grotesque composition with an indigenous man crucified on a Mayan temple as a sacrifice to the imperial eagle. He was then invited to leave the country and his work erased four years later. However, local Latin and Chicano communities made attempts to preserve it. Recently, the Getty Foundation did a scientific restoration of the mural and build an interpretation centre to protect it and to musealise it.⁷³ He was invited to leave the country. In 1933, after he used for the first time pyroxylin, Siqueiros wrote:

'Vamos a producir en los muros más visibles de los costados descubiertos de los altos edificios modernos, en los lugares plásticamente más estratégicos de los barrios obreros, en las casas sindicales, frente a las plazas públicas y en los estadios deportivos y teatros al aire libre... Vamos a sacar la escultura del absurdo del taller y del banco giratorio para restituirla policromada a la arquitectura.'⁷⁴

Although his words were prophetic of what started happening in Mexico, Chile and the USA systematically since the 1950s,⁷⁵ by then he was soon locked and expelled again out of the country. In 1936 he was back in the United States, but in the east coast where he established the Siqueiros Experimental Workshop in New York City.⁷⁶ There he explored the chemistry of different materials, the use of photography, the application of stencils and the

⁷² Raquel TIBOL, *Siqueiros...*, p. 55

⁷³ Valerie Greathouse and Leslie Rainer, *David Alfaro Siqueiros: Murals in Los Angeles*, Los Angeles, Getty Foundation, 2016

⁷⁴ Raquel TIBOL, *Siqueiros...*, p. 58

⁷⁵ Robert SOMMER. *Street Art*, New York, Links, 1975; Eva S. COCKCROFT, John P. WEBER and James D. COCKCROFT, *Towards a People's Art: The Contemporary Mural Movement*, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1977

⁷⁶ Raquel TIBOL, *Siqueiros...*, p. 70

dynamics of pyroxylin in what he denominated ‘*manchismo*’ inspired by Leonardo da Vinci, that is the psychological power of imagination to perceive natural motifs on dirty, rugged and irregular surfaces. One of the creators who went to the workshop was Jackson Pollock, who years later should develop the abstract expressionist style of painting.⁷⁷ There he participated with Siqueiros in doing some of his experiments on the floor of the workshop.⁷⁸

By looking at the grotesque, this paper has shown some of the limits of Modernism as a unitary project. When rationalism is explored from Ruskin’s noble grotesque and its later development in relation to Art Nouveau, especially after William Morris, it provides a critical voice to Modernism from the inside which reconfigures its phenomenal boundaries. As it has been shown, the structural changes of the 1890s drove to develop creative alternatives of communication at public space that deserved to be looked at. That may be also helpful to understand the risks and potentials of modern-day street art practices. For instance, the lyric statement followed by Everard in Bristol to promote himself on the façade of his headquarters simultaneously shared a didactic celebration of the heritage of printing with the city and embellished the urban landscape. More clearly than it happened at Maison Cauchie, the aesthetics of Bristol’s mural were not empty pictorial exercises to beautify or mere propagandist statements to indoctrinate, but they called pragmatically to people’s awareness on the social usefulness of cultural industries and knowledge to produce human development. Moreover, the fact that Everard did it one century before than Banksy in the very same city demonstrates the long term of all these processes. The same happened in Chicago with the contemporary muralists of the 1970s.

On its part, Siqueiros demonstrated how both technique and technology may drive towards social conflict when they are only used to produce individual profit. His radical attempts to take part of Modernism showed some of the contradictions of the Modern project, how rationalism smashed rationality. Moreover, his contribution to Modern Art is undeniable and deserves recognition. Thanks to a critical view on Art Nouveau, he started a way of doing that can be considered a clear precedent of the practices of Street Art and Contemporary murals.

⁷⁷ Jürgen HARTEN, ed.. *Siquieros Pollock: Catalogue*, Düsseldorf, Dumont, 1995, 44-57

⁷⁸ Jürgen HARTEN, ed.. *Siquieros Pollock...*, p. 47

His effort to provide the world with mechanisms to provoke critical thought and communication while also producing art and sharing it with society actually engages the democratic foundations of Modernism. Finally, by turning waste into pigment, Gaudí implicitly developed an obvious ethic of ecology and sustainability. That was a master lesson given to humans on an earth grounded, open minded and integrative understanding of both architecture and painting which is still current and needed after decades of negative excesses and mistreatments to Nature. His conceptual shaking calls for wider and more inclusive practices that should be aimed to favour social cohesion and environmental sustainability. His way of looking beyond boundaries, in an actually Modernist way, not only anticipated Street Art, but the invention of pictorial abstraction. Therefore, it is now our responsibility to provide the people tools to assimilate the creative developments of external mural painting beyond passive hypnotism in order to adapt our species within the Earth to the actual needs of our century.

Curriculum Vitae

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