



**BIOGRAPHICAL SENSATIONS EXPRESSED IN
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MATERIAL AND COLOUR**

Professor: Prof Jon Bird

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Student: Alejandra Rojas Contreras

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“Art is an essence, a centre. (...)”

My life and art have not been separated. They have been together.”¹

I.- INTRODUCTION

I have primarily worked from painting to expand it to other languages, being interested in the creation of surfaces, textures and colours to communicate my thoughts/feelings/sensations. My work as an artist has also been a clear consequence of my life, in a similar way to what Hesse mentions above. Personally, I identify myself with this point of view as a philosophical position in art. In this context, my artistic approach is to explore possibilities and limits in the contemporary painting, using different languages to question painting, space and abstraction. My sensations play a central role in this questioning.

In this essay, I will analyse what I consider as the main sources of creation, material and colour, and I intend to show how the way in which they relate to each other can express sensations². These sensations, in my case, emerge from biographical experiences because they have influenced how I understand the world that surrounds me. In this respect, there are many topics that these fields -material, colour and sensations- could explore. However, because I have limited space and time, the main focus of this text will be the piece “WOUNDS *personal stories, universal stories* 09-08-2011 / 19-12-2011”, which was presented in the MA Fine Art Final Show 2012.

The methodology used will be related to physicality and colour's researches in the context of art history, regarding its theoretical and practical aspects, taking into account specifically the work of Louise Bourgeois and Eva Hesse. Moreover, I will incorporate a part of my educational background³, which has also been a relevant aspect in my art trajectory and for this research in particular. Also, at the end of this text, I will add two essays, written in the context of this MA, about two important artists who have made a huge impact in my view of art. They are about Gerhard Richter⁴ and Antoni Gaudí's pieces⁵. I really hope that these appendixes provide the reader with a useful complement of the following thoughts.

¹ Eva Hesse, in Artforum (May 1970), quoted in Lucy Lippard, *Eva Hesse*, (New York: New York University Press, 1976), 5.

² From the activation of five senses: hearing, sight, touch, smell and taste.

³ This background has definitely determined my career both as an artist and art teacher, and it has also stimulated my commitment to art education.

⁴ It was written for Art and Text course, Dr. Stewart Martin.

⁵ It was written in the context of my Erasmus exchange to Barcelona University, tutor Dr. Mireia Freixa.

I. a).- Main sources: material and colour

My work has a strong relationship with the idea of abstract painting because it is connected to one of its main purposes, which is to set interactions among shapes, materials and colours. However, throughout the years my projects have been located in the space, not exclusively on a canvas surface. I have been transferring two-dimensional spaces, from traditional painting, to three-dimensional ones as a contemporary way to understand painting. This approach relates to what Potts says, the “overturning of distinctions between painting and sculpture”⁶ and how ambiguous and unlimited this relationship could be nowadays. Nonetheless, I do not consider myself to be solely a painter or a sculptor, but my work draws on these two practices and their consequent installations.

Besides, I have always used the abstraction field⁷ in these experiences because of its capability to suggest and express sensations. “The space of abstraction is irreducible to representational space”⁸ because the abstract field contains many other aspects. However, we could understand that representation can exist within an abstract work. Andrew Benjamin says: “painting moves away from the realm of representation towards the abstract”⁹, referring to how abstraction avoids figuration aspects, not the idea of transmitting something, which could be also a way of representation¹⁰.

Abstraction can involve many elements; however, in my work the most relevant and strongest elements to stimulate my creativity are: materials, colours, textures, pictorial gestures¹¹ and organic forms. They are chosen because of their main characteristics and meaning regarding each project. Thus, they are mainly determined by my intuition at the time the artwork is created, which is highly linked to my biographical process.

⁶ Alex Potts, *The sculptural imagination: figurative, modernist, minimalist*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 338.

⁷ The topic of abstraction is deeper analysed in the appendix nº 2.

⁸ Andrew Benjamin, *What is abstraction?*, (London: Academy Editions, 1996), 7.

⁹ A. Benjamin 16.

¹⁰ As it was mentioned before, the theme of abstraction itself will be studied in the appendix nº 2.

¹¹ The analysis of textures and pictorial gestures is developed in the appendix nº 1.

I. b).- Link between art projects and life experiences

One of the main achievements in the MA Fine Art was to be aware of my working process, which has always been influenced by my life experiences. In fact, materials, colours and more are chosen by my feelings from a specific period of my life, the present at each time. I find and select specific materials and colours as an answer to my needs and not only because of themselves. These needs are highly motivated by my biography. Firstly, I detect what and how I feel the psychological atmosphere and the environment surrounding me. Secondly, I do experiments with those abstract sensations in order to find out the best way to communicate my ideas.

For instance, the piece "Something in the air"¹² was created to express sensations of calm and peace, as it was inspired by my arrival in London, which I experienced as very welcoming. The artwork showed one side of this city from my understanding and point of view, where the green and blue colours were extracted from the London map because of its parks and ponds. Besides, the shape of a horizontal line recalls nature and seascapes, which emphasises harmony. Thus, the plastic recycled materials contribute to the idea of lightness. They come from packaging and transporting and due to their protecting function there is suspended air inside them. The air in the middle of something was connected with my feeling of transition and adaptation to a new city, without stability. It was a relaxing position because at that arrival I had the opportunity to feel free and relaxed, pushing away ordinary responsibilities for a while. However, at the same time it was a very ambiguous period because I was aware that I did not belong to anywhere.

This piece is an example of a relationship between my artwork and my biography and how I am interested in converting my life experiences into a practice to embody them, in order to invite the viewer to make connections with their own sensations.

¹² It was exhibited in the interim show, March 2012 at Mile End Art Pavilion.



Image 1:
Something in the air,
Alejandra Rojas C.
2012,
120 cm x 985 cm,
Acrylic paint on recycled
materials, detail.

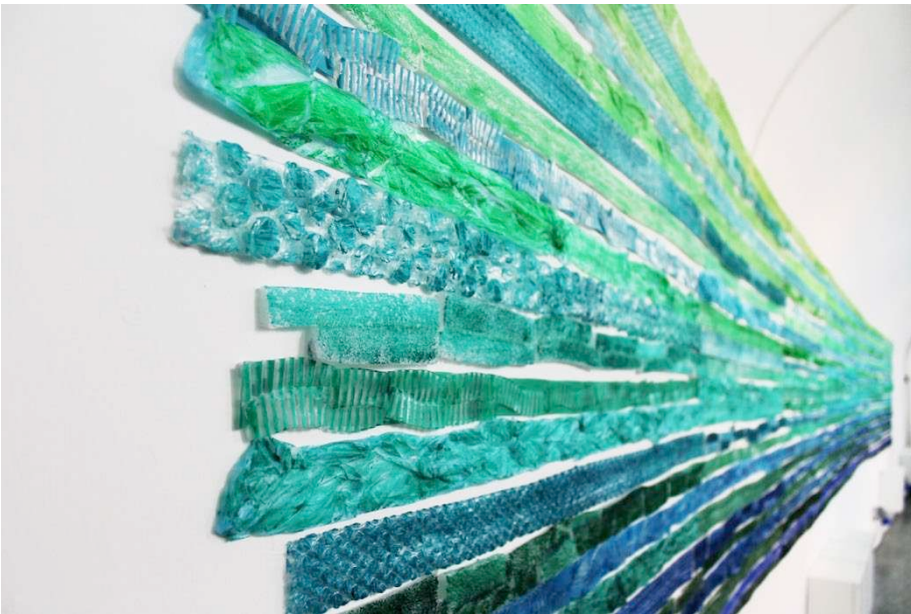


Image 2:
Something in the air,
Alejandra Rojas C.
2012,
120 cm x 985 cm,
Acrylic paint on recycled
materials, detail.

II.- MATERIAL

II. a).- Environmental concerns and recycled materials

As Benjamin says “the whole social function of art is revolutionized. Instead of being founded on ritual, it is based on a different practice: politics”¹³. Personally, I do not believe that ritual and politics are contradictory because they are extremes of the same spirit. I understand this spirit as the idea of not existing neutral positions concerning the social role of art. It is necessary to take some location/opinion, especially in cases where the issue is really important.

Since we live in a consumer society, where plastic packing and wrapping are everywhere, the recycling topic has become everybody’s important concern. It is well known that rubbish is nowadays a complicated issue regarding the environment and our relationship with it. This is one of the main reasons because ecological situation is important to me as an artist/person. Moreover, I do not like selecting new materials if I can choose another possibility, for instance, reusing them. My ecological concerns are also linked to my love of nature.

II. b).- Recollection, selection and physicality

Throughout the years, I have been attracted to ordinary materials/objects around and I have tended to collect them as *objet trouvé*¹⁴ and valuable belongings; nevertheless, they could be nothing... They have become especially significant to me because of their individual characteristics and connotations. I have carefully chosen some of these elements, which bring their own *aura*¹⁵ as they have been used before. Definitely, the story behind them encourages my intuition and creativity in order to recreate aesthetic experiences,

¹³ Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings Volume 4 1938-1940*, (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 257.

¹⁴ Concept brought from Surrealism, which explains an affective finding.

¹⁵ Aura is understood as the idea of authenticity and energy into something. In fact, aura means "air" and "breath" in Greek. W. Benjamin 255.

especially if I can appreciate particular information into their physicality. As a consequence, I am aware that this selection shows a philosophical position connected to my ecological concerns. Shapes, textures and surfaces produce haptic sensations that stimulate the sense of touch, but essentially through the sight. As Potts mentions, the “surface as fluid tactile”¹⁶ inspires our ordinary perceptions and recreates sensations that are almost indescribable. Hence, the physical features of these materials are capable to express sensations by themselves.

¹⁶ Potts 345.

III.- COLOUR

“For Melville, the truth of colour is merely cosmetic”¹⁷ what is possible because of its capability to cover surfaces and create illusions. However, colour is not only in the surface, instead, it is much more beyond it. Melville's statement briefly shows as “colour has been systematically marginalized, reviled, diminished and degraded”¹⁸ throughout art history exclusively to the function of covering. Nevertheless, as Batchelor mentions, “colour is in everything, but it is also independent of everything”¹⁹, mainly as colour can express something else beyond its form and substance. This makes colour an independent value in itself.

III. a).- Educational background: colour as raw material

The art school in my educational background²⁰ was hugely inspired by The Bauhaus²¹, where colour was an essential part of knowledge within the grammar of art. Two highlighted artists/teachers from the Bauhaus were Wassily Kandinsky and Josef Albers. As Gage states, “Kandinsky was probably the Bauhaus master most consistently involved in the teaching of colour”²² because “he developed his (...) *Colour-Course and Seminar*”²³. Besides, Albers, first as his student and later as his colleague, was “one of the longest surviving students and teachers”²⁴ there.

Kandinsky wrote constantly about the “spiritual notion (...) of colour”²⁵, and “the extreme relativity of colour sensations, and the failure of the mind to make correct judgments”²⁶ about this. However, sometimes some of his preconceptions were very strict about that, almost in contradiction with himself. For instance, his connection between

¹⁷ David Batchelor, *Chromophobia*, (London: Reaktion Book Ltd., 2000), 17.

¹⁸ Batchelor 22.

¹⁹ Batchelor 95.

²⁰ I obtained my first degree: Bachelor in Fine Art (2000-2004), at The Art School at the Pontifical Catholic University (PUC), Santiago, Chile.

²¹ It was a well-known school of Art, Craft, Design and Architecture located in Germany and initially led by Walter Gropius. It was situated specifically in Weimar (1919-1925), then in Dessau (1925-1932) and in its last period in Berlin (1932-1933).

²² John Gage, *Colour and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 260-261.

²³ Gage 261.

²⁴ Gage 263.

²⁵ Robert Storr, *Gerhard Richter, Forty years of painting*, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2002), 51.

²⁶ Gage 264.

geometric shapes and primary colours: “the yellow triangle, the red square and the blue circle”²⁷ shows a rigid position. This is because, this is not the only possibility for those relationships, essentially because this area is extremely subjective, as he himself had mentioned before. Despite of this, Kandinsky's teaching and pieces show us his gorgeous trajectory as an abstract painter and give us rich samples of many colour interactions.

Throughout the years, Albers tried to replace Kandinsky's theory by a kind of empiricism about colour²⁸, for teaching purposes. He created a theoretical and practical colour course to be applied to different exercises. Basically, he developed a practical way to understand the phenomenon and complexity of colour through specific and simple steps as a scientific method²⁹, which was effectively complemented with by physical theory. The whole study about colour and his art pieces made of Josef Albers “the greatest exponent of colour interaction”³⁰.

Albers had a strong influence in Chile³¹ and one of its main consequences was the fact that Professor Eduardo Vilches³², who studied at Yale with Sewell Sillman³³, started to expand the colour teaching from Albers's course³⁴. The Bauhaus is recognized as a powerful school that developed a special way of teaching creating a strong relationship between art, education and life³⁵. This learning was expanded beyond its geography and time, being an important part of art history. As Josef Albers says, “good teaching is more a giving of right questions than a giving of right answers”³⁶. In this sense, it is evident that the Bauhaus and its teachers gave us many questions, which are still interesting and valid for contemporary art. One of them was about colour and there are no final answers yet, but I really question myself if there will ever be any.

²⁷ John Gage, *Colour in Art, World of Art*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 87.

²⁸ Gage, *Colour and Culture*, 264.

²⁹ Storr 51.

³⁰ Gage, *Colour in Art*, 108.

³¹ In 1953, Albers was invited to teach some courses in The School of Architecture at PUC, in Chile. At that moment, Albers was leading The Art Department at Yale University. Afterward, a solid academic connection was built and years later some Albers's disciples continued travelling to Chile to teach at PUC in both schools of art and architecture.

³² Artist and Teacher at PUC.

³³ He was one of the most well-known Albers's disciples.

³⁴ Nowadays, this knowledge is an obligatory step in any bachelor degree into artistic areas in Chile. As a student, I was aware of this close relationship with the Bauhaus legacy and I knew that this knowledge would be an important key for my art research in the future.

³⁵ It is interesting to mention that the last big exhibition about the Bauhaus at The Barbican London 2012 was entitled Bauhaus: art as life.

³⁶ Josef Albers, *Interaction of Colour*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 71.

III. b).- Psychological environments: symbolic expression

Albers taught us that the main characteristics in colour are: tone, brightness and hue³⁷ and how, if we play with them, we can create several chromatic environments among them. However, these environments can change drastically with a subtle variation in only one of these characteristics of colour. It happens because “we almost never (...) see a single colour unconnected and unrelated to other colours”³⁸, our perception grasps mainly the whole instead of the separate parts. This illustrates the extreme subjectivity and vulnerability of colour. It is an accepted fact that local colour depends on its specific juxtaposed colour. This seems to confirm the assertion on “the relativity and instability of colour”³⁹. Therefore, different colour mixes can create not only as many atmospheres as possible, but can also generate many psychological environments and some types of psycho-chromatic experiences. This is because colour expresses itself according to its own temperature and chromatic range, each combination creating its own sensation. In fact, colour is like “variable vibrations of light”⁴⁰ and music⁴¹, as it also incites immediate sensations⁴². Consequently, “colour contains (...) enormous power, which can influence the entire human body as a physical organism”⁴³. This confirms that we understand colour essentially from its psychological aspect⁴⁴.

As Albers states, “in visual perception a colour is almost never seen as it really is, as it physically is. This fact makes colour the most relative medium in art”⁴⁵. This ambiguity explains why colour is so much more complex than Melville thinks¹⁷. Surely, its function is not only on the surfaces, it is in the whole spectrum of its interaction field. Why can colour be boring, then attractive, or energetic, or else, depressive? No doubt, these colour surfaces have clearly penetrated us much more deeply than just ornaments, we feel something strong and pure, we feel sensations.

³⁷ Tone: degree of light in a colour / Brightness: degree of pureness in a colour / Hue: the name of colour pigment.

³⁸ Albers 5.

³⁹ Albers 2.

⁴⁰ Gage, *Colour in Art*, 80.

⁴¹ Gage, *Colour in Art*, 81.

⁴² Gage, *Colour in Art*, 81.

⁴³ Kandinsky 1982 (1686), I, 159, quoted in: Gage, *Colour and Culture*, 207.

⁴⁴ Gage, *Colour in Art*, 215.

⁴⁵ Albers 1.

Maybe, we do not know exactly what colour is or how it works, but there is still a special feature that gives colour a gorgeous quality and supremacy in our ordinary human perception⁴⁶. This aspect brings a symbolic way of expression through colour, with a psychic and unconscious power, going beyond any intellectual skills.

At this point, I have reviewed the main sources of creation, material and colour. In the next chapter, I shall discuss the work of Louise Bourgeois and Eva Hesse. I shall do this from the standpoint of the sensations that their pieces express, in order to appreciate a link between sensations and biography. Then, in chapter V, I shall try and analyse how the aspects of material, colour and sensations interact as applied to my own work.

⁴⁶ Not only in the art world.

IV.- BIOGRAPHICAL SENSATIONS

“The dynamic of apprehending a work of art has a conceptual as well as a sensory dimension”⁴⁷.

IV. a).- Sensations

As Adorno states above, we need different approaches to grasp a piece of art as a whole, and we will focus our attention on the sensory one. Sensation involves biology and psychology, although it is difficult to differentiate the exact role of each science. Even though the five senses are what activates the experience of sensation itself, also memories and feelings contribute to this initial stimulus. This happens because these senses have developed hand in hand with learning and the understanding of our world, which is highly determined by life experiences. Sensations contain a part of our story and biography in a simultaneous and subliminal way, sometimes with an unclear and ambiguous provenance. Hence, as biology and psychology act almost at the same time and with the same level of preponderance, we could say that sensations are produced by a fast-chained process⁴⁸.

IV. b).- Bourgeois and Hesse as referents

Louise Bourgeois⁴⁹ and Eva Hesse⁵⁰ have differences in their work but also many aspects in common: a transcendent manifestation of their own lives into their pieces. They conveyed their feelings through their oeuvres, to embody them as catharsis, or maybe sublimation. They used different but “dense materiality (and some) condensations of weight and substance”⁵¹. Besides, the way they used the bodily space of each aspect contributed to the exploration and feeling of different sensations, mainly “bodily sensations”⁵².

⁴⁷ Adorno *Aesthetic Theory*, page 146, quoted in Potts 202.

⁴⁸ This process usually finishes with perception, it is to say, the interpretation of these sensations.

⁴⁹ She was a French artist (1911-2010).

⁵⁰ She was a German-American artist (1936-1970).

⁵¹ Potts 369.

⁵² Potts 209.

On the one hand, Louise Bourgeois claimed “the psychic resonances of the viewer's interaction with the object”⁵³ as a central role in that interaction, because of “her use of blatantly sexualised motifs”⁵⁴. In Bourgeois' work we can find a special connection with psychoanalysis throughout her entire life⁵⁵ and art trajectory, mainly with the concepts of *Eros & Thanatos*⁵⁶, as life/libido and death/aggression. As Wagner says, she creates “the wild and hidden reaches of sex and death”⁵⁷, generating extreme bodily sensations⁵⁸. Moreover, Cole mentions her rude forms “with indolent kitsch”⁵⁹ that made of her work “hardly an instrument of reconciliation”⁶⁰. Probably, this reconciliation comes from her traumatic childhood⁶¹, where these images emerged as a result of a mourning process. In the context of psychoanalysis, for Melanie Klein⁶² bereavement is “an expression of depressive anxiety”⁶³. For instance, Bourgeois' spiders encompass “the aggression of the other in its own monstrous phantasies of maternity”⁶⁴. Definitely, the powerful presence of pain and the values of sexuality⁶⁵ reflect connections with the primitive feeling and instincts of humans, connections that give her work a universal character. We can appreciate this sensuous quality in her *Soft Landscape I*⁶⁶.

On the other hand, as Potts mentions, “Eva Hesse's work represents (...) sculptural evocations of body image”⁶⁷, and these reminiscences of the human body were suggested by abstraction, one which is evidently *more abstract* than that in Bourgeois' pieces. However, it is still possible to see “material affinities with the more visceral latex work of Louise Bourgeois”⁶⁸; as Lippard restates, “Bourgeois' overtly sexual latex membranes”⁶⁹ show some significant connection between both artists. In fact, when the same author refers to Hesse's

⁵³ Potts 361.

⁵⁴ Potts 361.

⁵⁵ She was a patient in psychoanalytic psychotherapy for more than thirty years.

⁵⁶ They were known thanks to Freudian psychology.

⁵⁷ Mignon Nixon, ed, *Oxford Art Journal*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 22/2, 1999), 20.

⁵⁸ Nixon 22.

⁵⁹ Ian Cole, ed., *Museum of Modern Art Papers Volume One: Louise Bourgeois*, (Oxford: MMAO, 1995), 11.

⁶⁰ Cole 17.

⁶¹ Regarding the father's mistress and family dynamic, the husband's introduction of his mistress into the house develops pain, anger and anxiety in her daughter, Cole 17.

⁶² Psychoanalyst, who made an important contribution to understand the child's psychology.

⁶³ Mignon Nixon, *Fantastic Reality Louise Bourgeois and a story of modern art, An October Book*, (London: The MIT Press, 2005), 9.

⁶⁴ Nixon, *Fantastic Reality*, 276.

⁶⁵ Cole 31.

⁶⁶ See image 3.

⁶⁷ Potts 335.

⁶⁸ Briony Fer, *Eva Hesse: studiowork*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 60.

⁶⁹ Lucy Lippard, *Eva Hesse*, (New York: New York University Press, 1976), 83.

“umbilical imagery”⁷⁰, it is difficult to understand what this term exactly means, but no doubt, *umbilical* recalls the idea of body and physicality.

Besides, “Hesse's own encounter with the Bauhaus tradition”⁷¹, through Albers teaching, gave her “an insistent yet paradoxical relation to the handmade”⁷² that brings about a strong organic appeal into her pieces⁷³. For instance, *Ingeminate*⁷⁴ shows irregular organic shapes, with the power of sexual and phallic representation. In Hesse's work, the influence of body and embodiment seems to be much stronger than in daily life⁷⁵. Maybe this energy/force occurs because of the abstraction field, which can suggest more than figuration.

Possibly, her mother's suicide⁷⁶ impregnated her pieces of some cold and painful connotation but, surely, recalling her own short lifetime gives us a different and more dramatic reading of her art. After all, as she herself had previously said⁷⁷, it is necessary to understand her work and her life as a whole.

As Potts proposes, breaking with “the dominant (Western) model of subject and object”⁷⁸ could help us enter into a different psychological space and comprehend its pieces in terms of a total experience to the viewer. We cannot be fully aware of all things around us; they “cannot be fully encapsulated in our awareness of them as objects”⁷⁹. Thus, to really understand their oeuvres we would need to flow around their installations without the idea of distance and separation between our ego and the surrounding environment. Definitely, these artists have contributed to inviting the viewers to a new/special approach to works of art.

Louise Bourgeois and Eva Hesse's work has influenced the installation that we will analyse in the next chapter. I have felt strongly inspired by the materials they used, the way they displayed them, and the connections with their biographical experiences.

⁷⁰ Lippard 50.

⁷¹ Fer 64.

⁷² Fer 64.

⁷³ Lippard 50.

⁷⁴ See image 4.

⁷⁵ Fer 67.

⁷⁶ Fer 67.

⁷⁷ See quotation number 1.

⁷⁸ Potts 221.

⁷⁹ Potts 219.



Image 3:
Soft Landscape I,
Louise Bourgeois,
1967,
Plastic.



Image 4:
Ingeminate,
Eva Hesse,
1965,
Enamel, cord, papier-caché, latex rubber
4,78 x 11,5 cm (diameter)
Daros Collection, Switzerland.

V.- “WOUNDS *personal stories, universal stories* 09-08-2011 / 19-12-2011”

V. a).- Material and sensations

In this project⁸⁰, I used some recycled, industrial and plastic materials such as parts of umbrellas, air mattress fabric, metal sticks, needles, pins, chairs, cables, wires and others. They were ordinary materials with a strong artificial appearance and they were displayed in a room as a big pictorial space. There were objects and reused materials, and I worked with them as painting resources, but in a 3D support to create an installation. Indeed, I reconfigured these elements to express a loss. I sewed some parts of these materials to transform them into something else, so; therefore, each object was not itself in the new form. Something was missing, besides, the whole changed because some fragments were broken. However, nobody knows the way in which this new situation/reconfiguration has developed.

The processes of selection and recollection of materials rely on ordinary findings; for instance, objects found in the street, things that were left in my flat and that some friends offered to me for recycling. I was collecting these *objets trouvés* months before starting the piece, as I needed to get in personal contact with them, listening to and feeling them. However, during the working process I decided not to use all of them, depending on how I would configure this 3D image.

The creation of different textures -as well as some pictorial gestures and organic forms in the specific use of materials- generated a visible tension between an organic and an inorganic appearance. The project was built with artificial materials, although their shapes recalled movement and nature. The materials mainly consisted of three different groups: plastic fabric, metals and cables.

Plastic fabric from umbrellas and air mattresses had a particular brightness because of their waterproof quality. This materiality was linked to durability, resistance and camping/sporting experiences. Perhaps, that quality was not very welcoming to the viewer; in fact, in one sense it was distant, because it was protected from the external environment. It was not likely to absorb neither to exchange anything. The only area where materiality

⁸⁰ “WOUNDS *personal stories, universal stories* 09-08-2011 / 19-12-2011” was presented in the MA Fine Art Final Show 2012.

showed differently was about jointed nets and fragments, but most of the time it was impenetrable, its survival as if being defended by means of military associations. Moreover, the way how the pieces of fabric were sewed represented a visceral expression of cuttings, breaks and links.

On the other hand, metal sticks, pins and needles presented themselves with an aseptic precision that can remind us of metal tools in hospitals, except that some of these were quite rusty. Rust communicates something about time and damage. In this sense, the work was not strictly aseptic, but was still precise. Indeed, definite geometric shapes suggested by different types and sizes of metal/iron parts, mainly into verticality, emphasized this precision. Also, the sharpness of pins and needles conferred a subtle aggression and violence to the work. Their physicality was cold and the connotation of sharpness exhibited something raw and gritty, though not excessively, because there was always something that kept the order, avoiding complete chaos.

Moreover, two chairs in the middle of the room demonstrated preponderant presences regarding human objects, but with some coldness and rigidity. They were the only part of that exhibition that the viewer could have recognized as something with a real function and ordinary utility. These chairs, their colour, and geometric forms -being displayed way into the room- evoked human presences in a tension, because of their absences. In fact, the way they were located also suggested a fight or competition about power and domination.

Finally, cables and wires were like lines, fine lines that could draw through the surface. Sometimes they acted as veins, especially within plastic fabric, because of the stretched shape and the colour. At other times, the cables were describing close to circular forms, from their normal/original disposition before being used. Sometimes they were isolated, giving a strong appearance of some mess and chaos.

In general, the materials were used after some handmade intervention (painting, sewing, bending, melting or sticking) and they were usually under some kind of control, a *controlled disorder*. It was chaos but within specific circumstances, so as to allow a frame to be set. This sounds almost contradictory but it was visually possible. Besides, in the whole image there was some tension between a constructivist provenance, in metal and chairs, and the organic forms in fabric and cables. These completely different languages tried to coexist in order to express a message as a whole.

V. b).- Colour and sensations

“Colours (...) give the eye pleasure, but that pleasure is purely sensory”⁸¹

When facing this statement, I could question why sensory, in this context, has a negative connotation. As I reviewed in the last chapters, colour and sensations are very ambiguous; but this is not intrinsically bad. In fact, ambiguity gives art an extremely particular characteristic: it makes art unique⁸². “The importance of the sensuous (...) is the response to pure art”⁸³. In fact, it connects us with the sensorial area of human skills, mainly through a haptic/optical stimulus. Hence, both colour and sensations work together, principally because “colour is indivisibly fluid”⁸⁴ and formless⁸⁵; also because sensations are also abstract, and we cannot locate or encapsulate them in specific shapes. Sensuality⁸⁶ is mainly the satisfaction of the senses, and colour can strongly stimulate our senses through its energy.

Maybe some centuries ago, “it was possible to employ colour without taking into account the history of its usage”⁸⁷, but nowadays it is simply impossible to elude some associations that colours bring along. According to Batchelor, white suggests that somehow we are “suspicious of colour”⁸⁸, a sort of minimalist expression that replaces the sensual capability of colour with the neutrality of white. Indeed, white can represent some “sense of coldness, inertia and death”⁸⁹.

“WOUNDS *personal stories, universal stories* 09-08-2011 / 19-12-2011” creates a chromatic environment between three main colours: grey, blue and red, where different mixes among them generate a variety of purples. The constant repetition and interaction of these few colours sometimes gives the perception of almost a neutral/monochrome atmosphere. In this context, dark colours like grey, black and blue give some dramatic, or

⁸¹ Batchelor 30.

⁸² Possibly, in some cases where a work only gives pleasure without sense or meaning, we would agree about that negativity. Even in that case, it would be also difficult that some art project, in the contemporary context, would have a lack of meaning exclusively because of its sensory pleasure.

⁸³ A. Benjamin 12.

⁸⁴ Batchelor 86.

⁸⁵ Batchelor 86.

⁸⁶ This term has two different meanings: Sensuous refers to an aesthetic enjoyment / Sensual refers to physical senses or appetites.

⁸⁷ Sean Rainbird and Judith Severne, eds., *Gerhard Richter, Tate Gallery*, (London: Tate Publishing, 1991), 28.

⁸⁸ Batchelor 12.

⁸⁹ Batchelor 13.

depressive, atmosphere to the image, in terms of taking out energy, for instance. Grey being the mix of black and white, sometimes with something else, has a meaning of pure neutrality, of some kind of silence and boringness. In fact, the grey floor also interacted with some part of the walls, so floor, walls and objects were working together through colour.

On the other hand, purple is associated with mourning in the Christian tradition, where I am coming from. Purplish grey, on the wall, acted as silence into that space; sometimes, with distance, or in areas where the paint was flat, it contributed to create a peaceful ambiance. The difference arises when one can see details on the wall, many times filled with sad vertical drippings, as if paint had fallen softly and slowly over it.

In general terms, blue granted serenity and coldness at the same time, not only because of its natural association with the sea, but also with plastic supports. Thus, there was something in the relationship between colour and material that was almost impossible to disconnect. As a contrast, the small presence of red put on a tension, revitalizing the environment with force and passion. On many occasions, it worked as a fragile piece; in others, as a powerful presence, as in the case of the chairs, for instance. The other colours, mainly purple, grey and black, provided a background where the blues and reds played as the main characters.

As Batchelor concludes, throughout our Western culture, “no longer intoxicating, narcotic or orgasmic, colour is learned, ordered, subordinated and tamed. Broken”⁹⁰. Thus, here the use of colour generated a specific psychological ambient, but highly determined by the awareness of how colour has been understood in our codes. Its use was not naïf, there was a clear intention to provoke specific sensations of calm and sadness.

V. c).- Biography and sensations

The piece is comprised of a series of fragments of something that no one knows exactly what it is, but that evokes abstract/strange sensations. We are not sure of what we are looking at. However, there is an ambiguous feeling, of calm and pain at the same time. Possibly, the presence of blue soothes the environment, while the red lines, like bloodstreams, emphasise the opposite reaction/feeling. The veins go through the blue

⁹⁰ Batchelor 49.

colour and in this way the artwork presents itself as an inorganic physicality that sometimes seems more organic. Indeed, some fragments are in tension and movement, which may suggest transition. Besides, this pressure is emphasised by the strength and stress of the threads. Moreover, some sculpture shape elements seem to be falling to the ground as deadweight, maybe because they are still alive.

Material, colour and sensations were connected to symbolize a personal feeling. They were elements that re-presented emotions and fragmented moments from a difficult personal experience, one that almost worked as a trauma, and that was experienced as a mourning process. This flow was characterized by wounds, scars, tears, sadness, destruction, confusion and entanglement. Through the relationship between art and craft, especially from embroidery and seams, there was an intention to repair and redeem this loss, these wounds. In this mood there was no room for hope, but there were feelings of deception, fear, anger, pain, coldness and suffering. Moreover, the title "*WOUNDS personal stories, universal stories* 09-08-2011 / 19-12-2011" refers not only to something very intimate, but also to a personal reflection by anybody who has experienced difficulties and wounds. Also, this piece demonstrates how sensations are a fine vehicle to transmit own feelings and break the limit of personal experiences as isolated subjects. Our stories determine our lives, but they are not only ours, in a literal sense. Obviously, each story is very specific and personal, but there is a *something* that can transcend and become more universal.



**Image 5: "Wounds
*personal stories,
universal stories*
09-08-2011 / 19-12-2011",
Alejandra Rojas C.
2012,
Variable measures,
Mixed technique.**



**Image 6: "Wounds
*personal stories,
universal stories*
09-08-2011 / 19-12-2011",
Alejandra Rojas C.
2012,
Variable measures,
Mixed technique, detail.**



Image 7: "Wounds
personal stories,
universal stories
09-08-2011 / 19-12-2011",
Alejandra Rojas C.
2012,
Variable measures,
Mixed technique, detail.



Image 8: "Wounds
personal stories,
universal stories
09-08-2011 / 19-12-2011",
Alejandra Rojas C.
2012,
Variable measures,
Mixed technique, detail.

VI.- CONCLUSION

To sum up, the selection of materials in my artworks is not random, even though it is always different for each project. The use of recycled materials makes sense to me, both in our contemporary ecological context and in their own stories behind each of them. Materials can speak in silence through their own physicality.

Spontaneously, colour inspires sensations because of its relativity and complexity, which are not only possible to grasp from an intellectual viewpoint. As viewers, we need to use two approaches, intellectual and emotional. As I have previously discussed, colour is a large topic, related to energy and feelings. Clearly, it is not purely cosmetic. From this perspective, we can come to appreciate how the Bauhaus was a positive influence for many currents and artists, especially thanks to Kandinsky and Albers' works. This school was also relevant to me in my formative years, and still is, through these reflections. Nevertheless, as Gage proposes, there is still a gap in our understanding between colour perception, and sensation⁹¹. This needs further analysis: how we grasp colour is still a mystery⁹².

Biography can effectively influence art expression but it is not a requirement, so it depends on each artist's approach. As I reviewed, Louise Bourgeois and Eva Hesse displayed valuable connections between them and their stories, mainly from the angle of feminine sexuality and sensations. This connection is both valid and important in the analysis of my own work. This is an extremely interesting area for future reading and research because of its potential links with psychology. Surely, there is much more to say about it, but it was not the main purpose of this essay, because of its extension limits.

The relationship between material and colour has many possible faces: for me, one of the most important is the meaning they can convey together. Sensations are abstract manifestation of our feelings, intuitions, and more, and in the case of "*WOUNDS personal stories, universal stories* 09-08-2011 / 19-12-2011", I very much hope I have transmitted mine.

⁹¹ Gage, *Colour in Art*, 8.

⁹² Art therapy has started to explore profits that we can receive from colours and art in general; thus possibly, this area will make an important contribution to this analysis in the future.

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INTRODUCTION TO APPENDIXES

Gerhard Richter and Antoni Gaudí are very innovative artists and through their pieces they show us a new view of art and reality. As I mentioned briefly in the main essay introduction, I will incorporate two researches that I did during the year, which show a part of my theoretical approach to art.

Even though they were not contemporary, or fellow countrymen, or worked in the exact same area/profession, they had fair amount in common, and, from my point of view, this makes them very special in the history of art. They worked, and Richter is still working, using a great amount of approaches to their subjects, generating many explorations and exploitations of their sources. Also, they have shown contradictions along the route of their several works. Personally, I am interested in these contradictions because they express a great creativity.

APPENDIX I



**RICHTER'S SQUEEGEES AND COLOUR CHARTS:
A REFLEX OF HIS SCEPTICISM**

Lecturer: Dr Stewart Martin

Seminar: Art & Text FNA4099

Student: Alejandra Rojas Contreras

INTRODUCTION

The relevance of discussing *the Richter pictorial phenomenon* arises because Gerhard Richter's oeuvre involves many areas of knowledge and has influenced many artists, mostly on the subject of painting. However, he does not have disciples or "school", which makes him so paradigmatic and unique.

In this essay, I shall try to summarise his different approaches to art, and clarify some notions of his abstract paintings, focusing on squeegees and colour charts. Besides, I shall analyse possible connections between the concept of the neo avant-garde and Richter's abstract painting. Finally, I shall highlight his sceptical position, present in both aspects. The methodology for this essay is based on a careful selection of Richter's work, specifically choosing books related to his abstract work, mostly written by Benjamin Buchloh⁹³.

Although Richter's roots belong to the neo avant-garde period, his work has achievements beyond his own historical context. From my perspective, his unfettered vision of art has always been a continuous research of innovation, the pure notion of the avant-garde. By researching this topic we can establish why his abstract works have made a great contribution to the art world throughout the years. In addition, one of my main interests in art is focused in non-traditional painting in the contemporary context, and Richter frequently challenges spectators about how abstract painting raises the problem of the painting-language. As Frank indicates about Richter's work, his "paintings are statements about ideas for paintings"⁹⁴.

⁹³ German-American writer and art historian, who has worked with Richter during many years and is currently working on a monograph titled *Gerhard Richter: Painting After the Subject of History*. I selected this author because he has strongly shown the idea of diversity and complexity in the painter's aesthetics and also the implicit contradiction in his working methods.

⁹⁴ Peter Frank, "Gerhard Richter (Onnasch)", *Artnews* 72, no. 9 (November 1973): 100, quoted in Robert Storr, *Gerhard Richter, Forty years of painting* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2002) 16.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Gerhard Richter was born in 1932 in Dresden, Eastern Germany, a city known as “the old metropolis of the Saxon-Prussian culture”⁹⁵. The Second World War atmosphere and the consequent division of his own country heavily marked his early biography. These situations defined his life, both as a person and as an artist. As Richter says: “if you grow up first in a Nazi system and then under a Communist system... that is enough to make anyone sceptical”⁹⁶. In 1961, he moved to West Germany to study at The Düsseldorf Academy, where he met Joseph Beuys and Karl Otto Götz, whose motivations were decisive⁹⁷. Moreover, his art views and perspective were mainly influenced by the work of Fontana, Pollock, and the Fluxus group. All these influences made Richter re-educate himself as a painter⁹⁸, challenging himself to be always alert. Nowadays, in his early eighties, he is considered as a transcendent painter who, for instance, has had the honour to represent his country at The Venice Biennale⁹⁹ twice.

HIS WORK

Richter's work fluctuates between abstract expressive, and figurative forms. His work has been studied by different authors. Amongst them, Nestegard states that Richter is a creator of several access codes to reality and imagination¹⁰⁰, as he has analysed the question of the language of painting and revalidated that as a part of contemporary art. A significant discussion about his art pieces focuses on the question of gaze and reflection, and whether “the act of painting (...) must satisfy (the appetite of) a voracious eye”¹⁰¹. This could explain Richter's wide exploration in different genres of paintings.

⁹⁵ Benjamin Buchloh, *Neo-Avant Garde and Culture Industry Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975, An October Book*, (London: The MIT Press, 2000) 367.

⁹⁶ Mark Godfrey and Nicholas Serota, eds., *Gerhard Richter: Panorama*, Tate Modern, (London: Tate Publishing: 2011) 24.

⁹⁷ Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, *Gerhard Richter, The Art of the impossible - Paintings 1964-1998*, (Oslo: Astrup Fearnley Museum, 1999) 14.

⁹⁸ Storr 24.

⁹⁹ The years 1972 and 2007. Two different times and very separated moments in time.

¹⁰⁰ Astrup Fearnley Museum 11.

¹⁰¹ Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Birgit Pelzer and Guy Tosatto, *Gerhard Richter 100 Pictures*, (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 1996) 136.

He has broken the style myth, in order to push his paintings to the extreme of their possibilities. Richter “had no favourite pictorial themes”¹⁰², because he tries to explore “the most possible freedom”¹⁰³ to his oeuvre. In this sense, he has created works based on photographs and historical paintings; also, he has experimented with both small and monumental sizes. Some of the common topics and genres in his realistic paintings are: still life, landscapes, townscapes, seascapes, and portraits (some of them about political topics, such as Nazi and activist groups). In the abstract style, he has worked with grey paintings, monochromes, painted over photographs, squeegees and colour charts. In addition, he has made some sculptures and installations, such as the stained-glass window of the Cologne Cathedral in Germany. When he says, “I have no motif, only motivation”¹⁰⁴, it is clear that his work has been impregnated by his need to create, and vary, materials, media, and topics into this process.

THE CONTEXT WHERE HIS OEUVRE EMERGED: THE AVANT-GARDE

A crucial concept to understand Richter's production is the age of *the avant-garde*. This comes from a term in the “military tactics”¹⁰⁵ field referring to the front line of battle, where the soldiers are face to face with their enemies. This idea was brought into the art world to express the “forefront of artistic expressions and achievement”¹⁰⁶. The historical avant-garde took place between 1915 and 1925 in Europe¹⁰⁷, and it contributed to the flowering of many styles at the same time, with different philosophies. It was a big change in the art field, as it broke with traditional ideas. Many currents were born during that period: cubism in Spain, futurism in Italy, expressionism in Germany, surrealism in France¹⁰⁸, and others; sometimes in competition with each other, but always against conventionalisms. For

¹⁰² Richter “Interview with Schütz”, (Daily Practice: 212 Notes, 1964) 23, quoted in Robert Storr 42.

¹⁰³ Richter, *Interview with Benjamin Buchloh*, (1986), quoted in Helmut Friedel and Martin Hentschel, *Gerhard Richter 1998*, (London: Anthony d'Offay Gallery, 1998) 11.

¹⁰⁴ Richter, ‘20 February 1985’ (2009) in *Notes* (1985) 140, quoted in Mark Godfrey and Nicholas Serota 134.

¹⁰⁵ John Merriman, “Rapid Industrialization and its changes 1870 – 1914”, *A History of Modern Europe 2*, (1996) 894.

¹⁰⁶ Merriman 894.

¹⁰⁷ Buchloh 22.

¹⁰⁸ Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic theory (The international library of phenomenology and moral sciences)*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) 37.

instance, Merriman comments how Picasso broke with tradition presenting 'Les Demoiselles d'Avignon', as he dared to create a complete new perception of reality¹⁰⁹.

As Buchloh describes, Picasso and his pluralistic purpose was a model for young art students¹¹⁰ and it is clear that Richter was one of them. In fact, Picasso and Richter share the concept of anti-style and the aspiration to never stop searching, which means to continue to explore, innovate, and vary. Richter has broken with "style as a stylistic principle"¹¹¹ and, moreover, has continued to uphold the idea of *no style*. If the aim of the avant-garde was "to change the world by means of art"¹¹², now Richter's current creative struggle is not against others but with himself¹¹³, challenging his own artistic process.

THE NEO AVANT-GARDE

According to Buchloh, Richter is a neo avant-garde artist, whose period took place between 1945 and 1975, mostly in New York¹¹⁴. The neo avant-garde meant the return of the avant-garde but now from different social, political, economical, philosophical, and geographic contexts. As Del Río explains, this new stage emerged as an alternative to joining heterodox expressions, and the end of the Second World War, which characterized the neo avant-garde¹¹⁵. The return to the idea of the avant-garde signified that the artists re-think their role in society and in the culture system, from a critical position¹¹⁶. Nevertheless, the neo avant-garde changed "the romantic rhetoric of the avant-garde"¹¹⁷ and re-thought its "temporality and narrativity"¹¹⁸. By adopting this perspective, Richter continued wondering about painting history and its role in social history¹¹⁹, for instance, studying and quoting the Romantic Movement, especially German Romanticism its landscapes.

¹⁰⁹ Merriman 899.

¹¹⁰ Buchloh 367.

¹¹¹ Klaus Honnef in: Gerhard Richter: *36 Biennale in Venice German Pavilion*, (Venice 1972), 16 quoted in Sean Rainbird and Judith Severne, eds., *Gerhard Richter, Tate Gallery*, (London: Tate Publishing, 1991) 11.

¹¹² Rainbird and Severne 23.

¹¹³ For instance, Richter was working in *The Series October 18, 1977* and making a large-scale abstract portrait of his daughter in the same period which means that he frequently likes to work using different approaches and styles (Storr 78).

¹¹⁴ Buchloh 22.

¹¹⁵ Victor Del Río, "El concepto de las neovanguardias en el origen de las teorías del arte posmoderno", *AAVV, Octavas falsas. Materiales de arte y estética 2*, (Salamanca: Luso-Española Ediciones, 2006) 1.

¹¹⁶ Del Río 2.

¹¹⁷ Hal Foster, *The return of the real: the avant-garde at the end of the century*, (Massachusetts: MIT, 1996) 15.

¹¹⁸ Foster 4.

¹¹⁹ Godfrey and Serota 11.

When the declaration of the death of painting took place around the seventies and later, Richter “never seriously considered abandoning painting”¹²⁰. Furthermore, he responded to this statement¹²¹ by continuously repeating the act of painting. Consequently, in his abstract works during “the seventies and eighties, Richter rediscovered the potential of the pictorial subject”¹²², which meant that he took a political position as a painter, to face this postmodernism context. As Rainbird claims, Richter “has attracted many commentaries examining his role (...) as a painter of postmodern heterogeneity beginning his career during the final epoch of late modernism”¹²³.

Richter's art is closer to Benjamin and Adorno's ideas¹²⁴, indicating his important critical reflexivity skill¹²⁵, especially about their concepts of aura in painting, dialectic negativity, modern ideas of progress, and postmodern thoughts. In a visual sense, Richter has expressed Adorno's negativity¹²⁶ by refusing any traditional “representation that claims to articulate and mediate subjective experience”¹²⁷.

HIS ABSTRACT PAINTINGS

After having reviewed some aspects of Richter's biography and art trajectory, I shall now to consider Richter's abstraction and his methods, and shall analyse squeegees and colour charts.

The abstraction term refers to the relationship with a part of reality, but from suggestions and extractions of it, described as an aesthetic experience¹²⁸. Adorno said that an “aesthetic experience is the experience of something which the spirit *per se* does not provide, either in the world or in itself”¹²⁹. As Richter explains, “the abstractions are different, very active, more complicated, messy, a bit of a battle”¹³⁰ and it is perhaps

¹²⁰ Rainbird and Severne 12.

¹²¹ The death of painting.

¹²² Rainbird and Severne 15.

¹²³ Rainbird and Severne 18.

¹²⁴ Storr 64.

¹²⁵ Buchloh (2012) 172.

¹²⁶ Buchloh, Gidal and Pelzer 69.

¹²⁷ Buchloh, Gidal and Pelzer 69.

¹²⁸ Obrist, Pelzer and Tosatto 13.

¹²⁹ Adorno 196.

¹³⁰ Godfrey and Serota 16. Richter has absolutely refused to treat abstraction and figuration as parallel and completely different practices, because both are essentially painting.

because of their lack of space and time¹³¹. Analysing the particular phenomenon of abstraction could be an extensive task but, for this essay, this notion shall be reduced to its most important elements of colour, forms, textures, and gestures¹³².

Richter uses colour to create mysterious environments, sometimes as transparency or opacity¹³³, others as “aggressive colour juxtaposition”¹³⁴. However, Richter's colours cannot be clearly defined because of the question of “its own spectrum of meaning”¹³⁵ and also because he chooses a wide amplitude of colours. Moreover, in his works, colour¹³⁶ acquires autonomy itself because it does not only function as chromatic value¹³⁷. Instead, his “chromatic polarities, (...) at times seductive, at times histrionic, only intensify the sense of deeply anti-aesthetic scepticism”¹³⁸. Colour works as mark and substance¹³⁹ at the same time, and gives his artworks “different spatial suggestions”¹⁴⁰.

The methodology of Richter's abstract paint, mainly in squeegees, is characterized by a “brushed generally thin, gently seismic vertical and horizontal hatchings”¹⁴¹. His process emphasises the alternation between “generation and destruction”¹⁴², that is to say, his concept of painting involves advances and regressions. Richter has avoided the idea of expression and emotionalism in the first-person¹⁴³. Nevertheless, it is easy to appreciate that his abstractions evoke temper, and sensations,¹⁴⁴ and that his paintings are not exclusively formal, or expressive¹⁴⁵. He draws on spiritual elements, like Kandinsky, as well as on more scientific colour theory, like Albers, to create casual and mechanical¹⁴⁶ appearances. In conclusion, Richter has employed several methods to avoid “images of clichéd associations and emotions”¹⁴⁷ and for this, he has been always imposing restrictions to himself¹⁴⁸. As

¹³¹ Poetter 49.

¹³² Friedel and Hentschel 12.

¹³³ Benjamin Buchloh, Peter Gidal and Birgit Pelzer, *Gerhard Richter 4900 Colours*, *Serpentine Gallery*, (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2008) 91.

¹³⁴ Godfrey and Serota 124.

¹³⁵ Buchloh, Gidal and Pelzer 61.

¹³⁶ Colour understood as a pictorial and graphic element.

¹³⁷ Buchloh 392.

¹³⁸ Benjamin Buchloh, “The Chance Ornament”, *ArtForum* (February 2012) 174.

¹³⁹ Buchloh, Gidal and Pelzer 61.

¹⁴⁰ Godfrey and Serota 130.

¹⁴¹ Storr 42.

¹⁴² Friedel and Hentschel 17.

¹⁴³ Storr 39.

¹⁴⁴ Astrup Fearnley Museum 52.

¹⁴⁵ Astrup Fearnley Museum 52.

¹⁴⁶ Friedel and Hentschel 13.

¹⁴⁷ Storr 84.

¹⁴⁸ Buchloh (2000) 384.

Storr suggests, he has been a “poet of alterness and restraint, of doubt and daring”¹⁴⁹, proving to be a dialectical and systematic artist¹⁵⁰.

THE SQUEEGEES AND COLOUR CHARTS: TWO OPPOSITE APPROACHES

Inside Richter's abstract heterogeneity, his squeegees and colour charts represent two opposite approaches. Richter uses combinations of colours in frequent repetitions of mechanical appearances and mathematical systems.

First of all, in his squeegees the brushes appear as expressing an “emotional, spiritual, or psychosexual meaning through semi-automatist, highly gestural”¹⁵¹ manners. These paintings are produced as a combination of many layers of paint, which are “over painting, scraping and scratching”¹⁵², since the process tries to deny the intervention and control of the artist¹⁵³. The squeegees create random mixes of several colours, strongly textured appearances, and expressionist gestures. Richter uses the “specificity of procedural and processual detail”¹⁵⁴ through the technical application of layers as a pictorial process of self-criticism¹⁵⁵.

Alternatively, the use of colour in his colour charts¹⁵⁶ is a sign of systematic neutrality where “the chromatic spectrum (plays) in such a way that no one colour dominates”¹⁵⁷. Colour charts show a gestural negation, in contrast to squeegees,¹⁵⁸ and they are “a version on Pop Art”¹⁵⁹ mainly for their pure flatness and the lack of mixing in each square. They try to demonstrate “the aura-abolishing”¹⁶⁰, especially through the random manner of distributing the sequences of colours¹⁶¹. In fact, their repetition and selection “are

¹⁴⁹ Storr 89.

¹⁵⁰ Buchloh (2000) 389.

¹⁵¹ Buchloh (2000) 397.

¹⁵² Rainbird and Severne 30.

¹⁵³ Rainbird and Severne 30.

¹⁵⁴ Buchloh (2012) 173.

¹⁵⁵ Astrup Fearnley Museum 48.

¹⁵⁶ Actually, colour charts were integrated into a set of contemporary aesthetic researching on pictorial strategies and also the work of Daniel Buren and On Kawara. See: Benjamin Buchloh and Nicholas Serota, *Gerhard Richter: Abstract Paintings*, (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1979).

¹⁵⁷ Buchloh, Gidal and Pelzer 122.

¹⁵⁸ Buchloh (2000) 395.

¹⁵⁹ Friedel and Hentschel 12.

¹⁶⁰ Rainbird and Severne 27.

¹⁶¹ Rainbird and Severne 17.

simultaneously imperative, automatic and unpredictable”¹⁶². The random position of each colour square (sometimes rectangle) shows a deliberate idea of as many combinations as possible and also the potential breadth of colour variations¹⁶³. Furthermore, when there is no presence of a white grid¹⁶⁴, the image reminds us of computer pixels, since each isolated colour square could be a small part in a close-up observation of an image.

Although there are intrinsic differences between squeegees and colour charts, both show Richter's position in relation to abstraction, a position that is a sceptical and critical perspective of what painting is. Because of that, almost forty years after the neo avant-garde period¹⁶⁵ it is still possible to appreciate connections between some characteristics of this era and these two kinds of paintings. Richter uses those inputs to explore all different sources and their possibilities, exploiting each one to exhaustion¹⁶⁶.

¹⁶² Buchloh, Gidal and Pelzer 120.

¹⁶³ Astrup Fearnley Museum 50.

¹⁶⁴ It is the case of image 10.

¹⁶⁵ It occurs in the transition between modernism and postmodernism.

¹⁶⁶ It occurs in the same way during his whole trajectory; however, this essay focuses on squeegees and colour charts mainly.

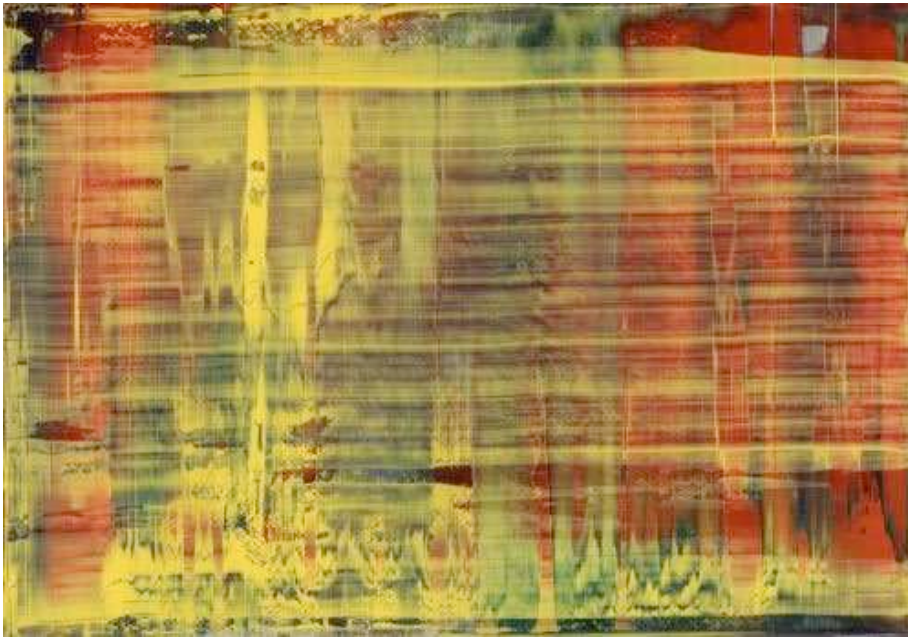


Image 9: Squeegee.

Gerhard Richter,
"Abstract Painting", 2001,
50 cm x 72 cm,
Oil on Aludibond,
Catalogue Raisonné: 871-6

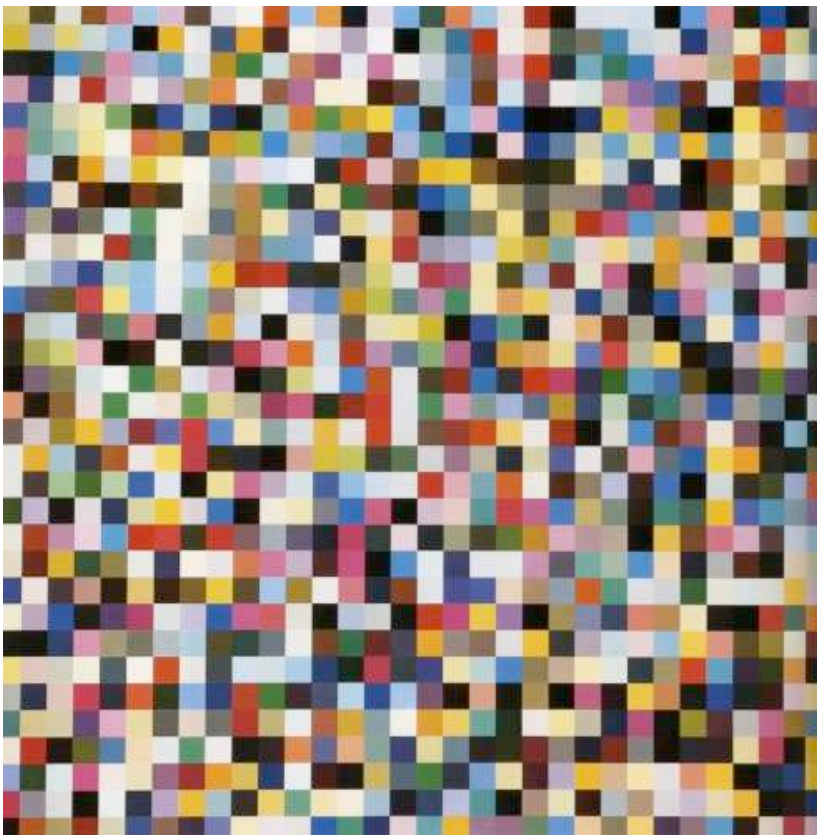


Image 10: Colour Chart.

Gerhard Richter,
"1024 Colours", 1974,
299 cm x 299 cm,
Enamel on canvas,
Catalogue Raisonné: 353-5

HIS SCEPTICISM

Scepticism is a feature of the neo avant-garde; scepticism about the artist's place and function in particular, and also scepticism about the artist's work as linked to social history. Richter is always thinking, questioning, and reviewing his artwork with a sceptic approach. We can appreciate this in the manner he repeats some processes once and again, as a need to find or corroborate something. Moreover, he does not only repeat the original process; in fact, he does exactly the same but now following the contrary process, as it can be seen in his squeegees and colour charts. He likes to face the difference in the exact opposite process time after time. For instance, while in his squeegees he mixes every colour without limit and form, in his colour chart the grid/border and flatness of each colour are the most important restrictions. Working in parallel ways allows him to follow more than one current. Possibly, he is afraid of falling into false beliefs, and this strategy makes him aware of the possible threats/traps of taking only one position. Thus, this shows scepticism about his own self.

His paradoxical¹⁶⁷ and contradictory character as a painter has allowed him to do more than following one trajectory exclusively; indeed, he has followed many, and in depth. Curiously, on the one hand his work is unidirectional and narrative, from where we can understand his development and improvement, and this is linked to modernism. However, in a parallel way, he can also follow another approach, multidirectional, unpredictable, which tracks no narrative ideas, and that is related to postmodernism¹⁶⁸. Sometimes he seems to be in a modern model, at other times he seems to break with it. In this context, following the modern model would mean to be extremely systematic and strict in using a specific method, to produce a successful outcome. This is the premise on which modernity settled its bases, the Utopia of finding a result, as a *treasure*. Richter shows that he still believes in some ideals about development because he follows a strict way of evolution, creating different processes of experimentation. This system is evidence of his modern side. However, every

¹⁶⁷ The paradox could be a great motivation to do reflections and analysis about the complexity of reality.

¹⁶⁸ Postmodernism is a break with the modern model. It represents a "cultural break" in the social history from the 19th century until late '60. Modernism involved: Industrial Revolution, Romanticism and Classicism. The ideas of progress and evolution were changed dramatically because postmodernism stopped believing in these concepts.

It is not the purpose of this essay to define the whole complexity of these periods, both modernity and postmodernity. See: Ann Kaplan, ed., *Postmodernism and its discontents*, (London: Verso, 1988), and Hal Foster, *The return of the real: the avant-garde at the end of the century*, (Massachusetts: MIT, 1996).

There is a relationship between both couples of concepts: *modernism* / *post-modernism* linked to the social process in general and *avant-garde* / *neo avant-garde* more linked to the art world specifically.

time he breaks with an idea, he shows all the different positions he takes in relation to the modern model, and this confirms that he is not naïf about those ideals. Definitely, he uses contradiction itself as a strategy; this tension between both sides makes Richter so exceptional, extreme, and unpredictable. Through these polarities he shows us how he thinks and reflects about his own work all the time.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, we can define Richter as an artist of polarity¹⁶⁹. The contrary approaches of his squeegees and colour charts, with their extensive range and variety, are examples of this. Through the analysis of Richter's abstraction, methodology, and colour expression, we can understand this pictorial phenomenon, one that has a significant connection with the neo avant-garde purposes.

Clearly, Richter's biographical experience with the Nazi and Communist regimes influenced his sceptical position, which he has used in favour of his art trajectory and has allowed him to return the practice of painting more than once¹⁷⁰. The ambiguity and constant oscillation¹⁷¹ amongst extreme execution, anti-composition and anti-stylish painting, are evidence of this scepticism in Richter's oeuvre. Moreover, the manner of painting in Richter's squeegees and colour charts is proof of this incredulity. We can conclude that he tries to be objective about the most subjective topics, and thus that he sets impossible rules for himself.

As Poetter wrote about Richter's creations, "the open character of this view renounces all dogmatic and ideological restrictions on pictorial concept, emancipating the picture's subject matter from the role of a vehicle transporting a message"¹⁷². In my personal opinion, Richter still believes in a Utopia, the modern version being about progress and evolution; however, he often shows his own rejection of it, following the opposite direction. This tension, this polarity, is not subtle, in fact it is really extreme. He wants to demonstrate to us that he does not only believe in the modern/avant-garde notion, but also in the postmodern/neo avant-garde ones; at the same time, he doubts them, all of them. This paradox makes his work strong and self-critical.

Definitively, his message, his originality, and his sceptical position have made a relevant contribution to the art world, and to the artists, who are attracted and challenged to analyse his pieces and continue those explorations. As a consequence, I believe that Richter is a creative thinker who stimulates us to remember the artist's role, which is to produce thoughts and critical ideas, especially in our postmodern scene.

¹⁶⁹ Buchloh (2000) 388.

¹⁷⁰ Storr 54.

¹⁷¹ Obrist, Pelzer and Tosatto 146.

¹⁷² Poetter 43-44.

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APPENDIX II



**ARCHITECTURE OF LIGHT:
ABSTRACTION AND ORGANIC EXPRESSION
IN GAUDÍ'S CASA MILÀ**



Supervisor: Dr Mireia Freixa

Seminar: Erasmus Exchange

Student: Alejandra Rojas Contreras

*Special thanks to
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And Cátedra Gaudí for allowing me to use their archives*

INTRODUCTION

Gaudí's work is evidently huge and almost impossible to grasp in its totality, primarily because of its complexity. His work as an architect, designer, and artist made of him a genius with reference to these challenging areas. However, Gaudí was very controversial in his time, as his work generated many interpretations; nowadays, various implications, and dimensions, are still being read in his oeuvre, to try to understand his way of thinking. For instance, religion, politics, Catalan nationalism, and other causes have wanted to get hold of the complexity of his proposal as a part of their specific purposes.

Because of the 150th anniversary of his birth, 2002 was declared International Year of Gaudí, and the city of Barcelona celebrated and promoted all his pieces in an extraordinary way. Even though Gaudí is quite famous these days, he was almost forgotten for twenty or more years after his death¹⁷³. Nevertheless, since 1960 people started to re-validate his ideas and creations¹⁷⁴. It was as a consequence of the fact that architects, like *Le Corbusier*¹⁷⁵ kept alive the interest in his pieces, because they could appreciate Gaudí's visual thoughts. Throughout the years, more and more people recognized his geniality and, in 1984 and 2005, UNESCO declared seven works of Gaudí as world heritage sites. These were: The Sagrada Família¹⁷⁶, Colònia Güell's crypt, Park Güell, Palau Güell, Casa Vicens, Casa Batlló and Casa Milà.

The main purpose of this essay is to reflect about Casa Milà, well known as La Pedrera, and find out if it is possible to apply the concepts of abstraction and organic architecture to this piece, from an artistic point of view. Both notions will be examined particularly *in facade*, even though they were not developed, as we currently know them, when Gaudí was alive.

¹⁷³ Probably, this process happened because of the Civil War in Spain (1936-1939) and the Second World War (1939-1945) and the consequent reconstruction of Europe. In fact, the Gaudí's friends Association was created in 1952 and also during 1956 the Catedra Gaudí was settled by a ministerial order, which was led by the architect and writer Juan Bassegoda i Nonell it for many years.

¹⁷⁴ This decline lasted until around 1970 and was reversed during 1980 because of the revival of Modernisme.

¹⁷⁵ Swiss-French architect (1887-1965). He learnt of Gaudí's work in 1928.

¹⁷⁶ The nativity facade, the crypt and the apse.

Besides, I have made some drawings¹⁷⁷ about Gaudí's general work, from pictures, and also directly from his oeuvre, to complement this learning experience.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

There is very little information about the personal life of Antoni Gaudí i Cornet¹⁷⁸, (Reus 1852 – Barcelona 1926), but one possible hypothesis is that he devoted almost his entire life to his creation.

As a child, he went to The Escolapian School in his home town, which was a determinant for his Catholic religious orientation. Then, during his youth, his vocation was strongly influenced by his father's profession¹⁷⁹. Thus, in his adulthood Antoni Gaudí's family was composed only by his father Francesc Gaudí i Serra (1813-1906), and his niece Rosita Egea i Gaudí (1876-1912); Antoni never got married¹⁸⁰ or had any children. After his niece passed away, people around him noticed that he became a very lonely person. Actually, perhaps there was a link between Rosita's death and his decision of refusing to accept any other project except The Sagrada Familia. In Fact, he put all his energy in it until his death, an example of his spirituality. Another important characteristic was his commitment to the struggle for Catalanian identity, in terms of nationalist feelings and political vision, which in that period were strongly supported by the Catholic Church.

¹⁷⁷ I have drawn some parts of his work in order to understand his creative process and be aware of how his volumes, surfaces and structures work, so as to be able to grasp part of his ideas. In fact, I am working from John Berger's conception with respect to the act of drawing: another way of catching the world and translating it into our own expressions. "For the artist, drawing is discovering" John Berger, *Sobre el dibujo*, (Barcelona: GG, SL, 2005) 7.

It is possible to appreciate these using this link:

<https://plus.google.com/photos/106677009228657988076/albums/5817806906837769041?banner=pwa&gpsrc=pwrd1#photos/106677009228657988076/albums/5817806906837769041/5817806904395671634>

¹⁷⁸ Probably, important documents were missing when Gaudí's workshop was burnt in 1936, because of the beginning of the Civil War in Spain. In any case, he published just a few writings and left other works in his sketchbooks. Nowadays, we have a more precise idea about his personal philosophy of life, because some disciples took notes of his comments and thoughts. In order, to study his personality and thoughts deeper, see: Laura Mercader, ed., *Antoni Gaudí, Escritos y Documentos*, Barcelona: El Acantilado, 2002.

¹⁷⁹ He was a cooper pan maker. This craft has a strong relationship with wrought iron work in general and the idea of making things by intuition. It is a specific methodology without planning.

¹⁸⁰ His only known love affair was with Pepeta Moreu, Gaudí's secret love. Afterwards, she rejected him.

THE CONTEXT WHERE HIS OEUVRE WAS INSERTED: MODERNISME

Art Nouveau¹⁸¹ was a movement inspired by Rococo in Europe and exotic provenances from the East, mainly Japan. This was the international name of Modernisme or Modern Style¹⁸² in Catalonia and it took place by the ending of the XIX century. This period is also characterized by the expansion of “The Renaixensa Catalana”¹⁸³. Modernisme was a syncretic movement because it joined many different currents and connected them through nature, not only due to their morphology but also to interpret them in order to generate an organic shape into an artificial way. It is basically the idea of nature being used in design.

The Modern Style focused primarily on architecture, and had the following features: visual referents that were inspired by nature, a wide presence of the decorative arts, Gothic¹⁸⁴ expressionism, which became very important, and also the spirit of revival of the crafts¹⁸⁵ that gathered strength in this industrialization period¹⁸⁶. Besides, at that time, the architects were concerned about making everything related to a building (from structure to furniture), because of the concept of totality in the Modern Style. Also, it emerged because there was not an exact definition of the specific roles of the architects and designers, as we nowadays know them. The most important architects in Barcelona during that period were Lluís Domènech i Montaner¹⁸⁷, Jose Puig i Cadafalch¹⁸⁸ and Antoni Gaudí¹⁸⁹. All of them used the concept of total art, connecting details with totalities and old tendencies with new ones.

Gothic cathedrals also promoted a natural mix of art, architecture, and design, everything was held together in those sacred spaces. Even though that was a characteristic of the Modern Style, Gaudí was more ambitious and tried to create new architectural

¹⁸¹ Name of this movement mainly used in France and Belgium.

¹⁸² It is important to make a distinction between Modernisme as Art Nouveau, on the one hand, and the idea of Modernity, on the other. It is impossible to deny the connection with a revolutionary spirit in both concepts, but it is fundamental to make clear that Modernity is associated in opposition to Post-modernity and this is not the main theme of this essay. I will use the word Modernisme regarding the style to which Gaudí belonged. In other countries this style had different names, for instance, it was called Liberty in England and Italy also, and Jugendstil in Germany.

¹⁸³ Period characterized by the revival spirit of the Catalan language, traditions and economy. They were inspired by their own Catalan Gothic climax.

¹⁸⁴ The Neo-Gothic or Gothic revival took off from the second half of the 18th century, especially in England, The Palace of Westminster is a good example of it. This style worked as a contrast to Neo-Classicism. Moreover, some restoration in important Gothic cathedrals as Notre Dame of Paris and Cologne took place in this period.

¹⁸⁵ The Art & Craft movement in England was an important source of inspiration.

¹⁸⁶ After the industrial revolution, production in series completely changed people's mentality. Thus, the promotion of crafts sounded like something from the past, very outdated.

¹⁸⁷ (1850-1923).

¹⁸⁸ (1867-1956). In fact, both architects had a strong social/political influence in their society.

¹⁸⁹ He did not travel very much, but he received foreign information and influence through international magazines, specifically from France, England, Germany and Italy.

solutions. He refused the gothic arches because he thought buttresses and flying buttresses were completely unnecessary. In fact, he was right and he demonstrated it by using catenary arches¹⁹⁰, which can support their weight by themselves. Actually, he applied these arches to the majority of his buildings and “the successive catenary arches have different widths and are consequently of different heights”¹⁹¹, which allowed him to create new shapes and constructions.

HIS WORK

Although the Modern style is the context where his work was born, as Pevsner says, “Gaudí’s architecture poses even more urgently the problem of how far Art Nouveau as a term with analysable, useful meaning can be stretched”¹⁹² into his oeuvre, as his creation is definitely beyond Modernisme. It happened, possibly “for his working in the comparative isolation of Barcelona”¹⁹³.

Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc¹⁹⁴ and William Morris¹⁹⁵, were important referents in Gaudí’s work, since their contributions strongly marked his arts vision¹⁹⁶. In fact, “the writings of Viollet-le-Duc, (...) were all part of Gaudí’s adopted cultural background”¹⁹⁷. Besides, “Viollet-le-Duc defines the laws of nature in terms of mathematics, physics and functionality, but primarily in terms of unity”¹⁹⁸ and this is something we can clearly appreciate in Gaudí’s work.

Also, his patron Eusebio Güell¹⁹⁹, and the friendship between them, were very useful to create new contacts within the élite in Barcelona’s society. This link was decisive to make his work really prolific as he could transform his projects into realities; ideas, materials and

¹⁹⁰ This is based on *the ruled surface* in geometry, which involves parabolic, hyperboloid, helicoids, and other geometric functions. These made an exceptional contribution to Gaudí’s architecture, one that helped create his famous undulating walls.

¹⁹¹ Joan Bassegoda i Nonell, ‘Casa Milà, a Legendary Monument’, *Barcelona and Modernity / Picasso, Gaudí, Miró, Dalí*, The Cleveland Museum of Art, (London: Yale University Press, 2006), 196.

¹⁹² Nikolaus Pevsner, *The sources of modern architecture and design*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985), 88.

¹⁹³ Pevsner 104.

¹⁹⁴ French architect and theorist (1814-1879), who wrote “Entretiens sur l’Architecture”, “Dictionnaire raisonné de l’architecture française du XI au XVI siècle”, among others. Another important contribution was the restoration of many Gothic buildings, but the most important one being Notre Dame in Paris.

¹⁹⁵ English designer (1834-1896) who led and promoted The Arts & Crafts movement.

¹⁹⁶ The figure of Viollet-le-Duc came to me many times during this research, in fact, much more than that of William Morris. Hence, it is the influence of the first that I will analyse later on.

¹⁹⁷ Kenneth Frampton, *Historia crítica de la arquitectura moderna*, (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 2010), 64.

¹⁹⁸ Caroline Van Eck, *Organicism in nineteenth-century architecture: an inquiry into its theoretical and philosophical background*, (Amsterdam: Architectura & Natura Press, 1994), 235.

¹⁹⁹ Güell (1846-1918) was a rich Spanish industrialist and entrepreneur, with many industries around Barcelona, specially textiles. He was a generous sponsor of the majority of Gaudí’s projects.

workers were disposed for his dreams to come true. Besides, the wide variety of projects with which Gaudí was involved represented a big challenge for him to reflect on and conceptualize architectural problems. He was a really hard working man, but sometimes he could not finish all projects²⁰⁰ or did even start some²⁰¹, they demanded more effort and creativity to solve an idea than had been pre-conceived by another person²⁰². In this context, the role of the architect is very different from what we conceive today, since Gaudí never worked in an office system; actually, he worked “essentially (.../as) the medieval craftsman”²⁰³.

On the other hand, many artists and architects have acknowledged Gaudí's influence in their pieces, not only Le Corbusier, Rem Koolhaas, Santiago Calatrava, Frank Gehry, Niki de Saint Phalle and even Henry Moore²⁰⁴, but also Japanese architects as Kenji Imai²⁰⁵, Hioya Tanaka, Etsuro Sotoo, Tokutoshi Torii and Toyo Ito²⁰⁶. All of them have created their own style, each in some sense being a reminiscence of the style of Antoni Gaudí.

Some common characteristics of Gaudí's buildings are: movement, ornamentation, organic forms, geometry, abstraction and connection with nature. He was strongly inspired by nature and though he did not use this term, we can certainly say that he applied the biomimicry²⁰⁷ concept to his work. This is clear when he says “The tree does not need external support. Everything is balanced in itself. Everything is in equilibrium”²⁰⁸. Sometimes his pieces also have a baroque reminiscence linked to *horror vacui*²⁰⁹, especially when he used vegetation, people and animals as ornaments, and most of them have some symbolism and religious connotation. Sometimes Gaudí adopted the Arabic style and the Japanese style from Oriental aesthetics, mainly in his early works.

Moreover, as it was natural in that period, he had the desire to produce everything into a space while considering even the minutest detail in furniture, objects, etc., even in the

²⁰⁰ Park Güell and Sagrada Família were examples of this.

²⁰¹ This is something significant in his work, as he usually continued, repaired, or restored houses or buildings that were started by others. For instance, in The Sagrada Família the architect Francisco de Paula i del Villar started the construction in 1882 but Gaudí took over that role just one year later. Other examples are Casa Batlló and Colegio Teresiano.

²⁰² He also restored the cathedrals of Palma de Mallorca, and of Manresa.

²⁰³ Pevsner 109.

²⁰⁴ Professor Paul Greenhalgh mentioned this connection in his talk about La Pedrera, 19th November 2012, because of the shapes and smoothness in the working of the stone.

²⁰⁵ He travelled to Europe in 1926 afterward Gaudí's death. This underlines the interactions between Japan and Europe from the early 1920s.

²⁰⁶ He created a building in front of La Pedrera during 2009, which is a tribute to it.

²⁰⁷ The terms *biomimicry* and *biomimetic* come from the Greek *bios*, or life, and *mimesis*, meaning to imitate. This concept studies nature as a model of systems and processes, in order to get inspiration from it.

²⁰⁸ Jose Rafols and Francisco Folguera, *Gaudí*, Barcelona: Canosa, 1929, 82-84, quoted in: George Collins, *The design procedures and working methods of the architect Antoni Gaudí*, (New York: Columbia University, 1973) 360.

²⁰⁹ Latin for “fear of empty spaces”.

building itself, as he was always taking into account both aesthetic and functional aspects²¹⁰. In this sense, he wanted to control everything: lamps, tables, chairs, fences, etc. His work did not make a distinction between shapes, structures and functions because these aspects were on the same level of importance for him²¹¹. “Gaudí understands his oeuvre as the whole piece, without distinctions between the so-called minor and major arts; they represent a totality where architecture, sculpture, painting (and) craft are included”²¹².

With respect to the use of materials, we can highlight two relevant aspects: the transformation of the material’s appearances and the recycled aesthetics. For instance, regarding the first feature, he treated wrought iron as if it had been moulded by hand²¹³, as is apparent from its smoothness. It is possible to appreciate the second aspect from the way he re-used material in his sculptures with mosaics²¹⁴.

THE CASA MILÀ

On 31st October in 1912 Gaudí signed the end of the construction of Casa Milà or La Pedrera (the stone quarry). This house was built during 1906 and 1912, commissioned by Perre Milà Camps²¹⁵ and Roser Segimon. It was declared a National Monument in 1969 and a World Heritage Site in 1984. Nowadays, this building belongs to Fundació Catalunya Caixa²¹⁶ and it is an important cultural centre in Barcelona²¹⁷.

Casa Milà was the last of Gaudí’s secular buildings and it is characterized mainly by a dramatic counterpoint and dynamism, more expressionist outside and more modernist inside²¹⁸. Gaudí used natural sunlight for illumination, and wind for the ventilation systems. He could do that as he started this project without any economical restrictions. During the construction process, he had both extreme freedom and a budget to create a spectacular

²¹⁰ If we analyse every piece in Gaudí’s work, we can observe the continuous mix of functional and aesthetic, where absolutely nothing is random. Interview with Silvia Villarroja, conservation manager at La Pedrera, on 5th December 2012.

²¹¹ Geo 75.

²¹² Fundación Caixa Catalunya, *Gaudí, Arte y Diseño*, (Barcelona: Grup 3, 2002), 11 (Text translated by the author).

²¹³ Geo 78. In fact, the way wrought iron is moulded seems very simple and easy, though this is a heavy and hard material.

²¹⁴ Some examples are: Park Güell, Casa Milà, Casa Batlló and Palau Güell. This use of mosaic is called *trencadis*, which implies the specific mix of mosaic reused from another construction as broken plates, bottles or cups, etc and the irregular way in which they are used, as each piece of tile has a different shape and size. It is very different from the classic mosaic, for instance in Palau de la Música Catalana (built by Domènech i Montaner), where each tile is a square shape of the same size.

²¹⁵ Perre Milà was an important politician of Catalanian high society.

²¹⁶ They bought it in 1986.

²¹⁷ It is interesting to mention that in order to celebrate 100th Anniversary of Casa Milà, Catalunya Caixa exhibited a group show entitled “Other Pedreras”, with the paradigmatic works of architects as: Guimard (French), Hoffman (Austrian), Horta (Belgian), Wright (Northamerican), Loos (Austrian), and Mackintosh (Scottish).

²¹⁸ GEO 88.

building in this new neighbourhood. Although since 1909 he had some legal difficulties with the owners of the project, Casa Milà was really a representative symbol of the Catalan Modern Style. Gaudí wanted “to render homage to the Most Holy Mary of the Rosary”²¹⁹ in La Pedrera, but, as a consequence of the difficulties above, he had to make some changes respect to the first model²²⁰.

Many aspects of this building could be analysed, but in order to cut to the chase I shall make a brief description of only four areas: structure, interior, terrace and façade. After that, I shall focus my analysis exclusively on facade.

STRUCTURE

The ground plan looks like a kidney with two holes, because there are two open spaces as backyards. The skeleton of Casa Milà is a continuous structure, even though it is located in a street corner. This can be because the main curve of the house breaks the structure usually found in corner buildings. It is part of La Pedrera's uniqueness.

INTERIOR

From the interior backyards, the viewer can appreciate a great and efficient use of natural light, shining through the interior balconies. On the walls, there are murals as tributes to the poems/tales of Ovid, Shakespeare and Calderon de la Barca and on the ceilings there are what look like watery curves, made out of plaster.

TERRACE

There are many chimneys, that became sculptures covered with mosaic, mostly with white and light pastel colours. This space is in general quite irregular, both in its stairs (found everywhere) and sculptures (in different sizes/shapes); all this creates a ludic atmosphere. Many analyses on this terrace suggest a link with Cappadocia²²¹ because of its verticality.

²¹⁹ Bassegoda i Nonell 197.

²²⁰ In fact, this building was conceived initially as a tribute to the Virgin Mary and there should had been a large sculpture. However, because of *The week of tragedy* in Barcelona during July 1909, when many political and social disturbances happened, the family Milà-Segimon decided not to include this sculpture. Today, only these Latin words on the top of the wall into the facade still remind us of it: *Ave Maria Gratia Plena Dominus Tecum*, a quotation from St. Luke. However, instead of the complete name, Maria, there is only the letter M with a rose below it.

²²¹ A region in Turkey with a special geography that contains vertical caverns, both natural and artificial.



Image 11: Casa Milà,
Antoni Gaudí,
1906-1912,
Barcelona



Image 12: Casa Milà,
Antoni Gaudí,
1906-1912,
Barcelona,
facade detail



Image 13: Casa Milà,
Antoni Gaudí,
1906-1912,
Barcelona,
facade and terrace



Image 14: Casa Milà,
Antoni Gaudí,
1906-1912,
Barcelona,
terrace

FACADE

“Architecture is the management of light”²²²

It is not difficult to realize that Gaudí really applied the idea of the management of light in a general sense to his architectural work. However, in my opinion, this statement takes a special significance regarding La Pedrera and its facade, as these are mainly sculptural works. According to Giralt-Miracle, this building is a key piece of Gaudí's architecture because “La Pedrera represents an archetype of his synthesis piece”²²³.

This building was built with stones from Montjuïc²²⁴ and other places near to Barcelona. Indeed, stones from Montjuïc were used on the floor and in the structure, stones from Garraf in the lower part of the building and stones from Vilafranca²²⁵ in the upper section. As Giralt-Miracle assumes, the use of stones here has some similarities with that in Finca Miralles²²⁶. One of those is movement, created by a continuous asymmetry and irregularity, giving heavy stones a light appearance and sensations of flux. The solid volumes produce a strong contrast with light and shadow, and this makes it difficult to differentiate between architecture and sculpture in this study case. These curves sometimes evoke the idea of mountains²²⁷, sometimes seascapes, but there is always a fascinating game between concave and convex surfaces. Analysing The Crypt of Colonia Güell, Pevsner says that its “approach is wholly asymmetrical, (...) inside does not correspond left with right”²²⁸. It is also possible to see this asymmetry in Casa Milà and, in my opinion, here it appears more strongly. Cesar Martinell²²⁹ concludes that “the facade rhythm is completely indistinct (with) undulating horizontal bands”²³⁰, which constitutes “as a whole the largest work of abstract sculpture ever realized”²³¹.

On the other hand, balconies in different sizes and levels create interesting chiaroscuros around the building, because of their metal works. They were made at Badia

²²² Josep Maria Carandell, *La Pedrera, Cosmos de Gaudí*, (Barcelona: Ed. Fundacio Caixa de Catalunya, 1992), 14.

²²³ Giralt-Miracle 75.

²²⁴ An important hill in Barcelona.

²²⁵ The Vilafranca stones used to have a soft yellow tone as natural coloration, but now it has disappeared, probably because of air pollution.

²²⁶ Daniel Giralt-Miracle, (ed), *La Pedrera Arquitectura i història*, (Barcelona: Caixa Catalunya, 1999), 57.

²²⁷ For instance, the particular serrated peaks, the cut-stones and the natural erosion in the Montserrat Mountain. This is common in some of the Spanish geology.

²²⁸ Pevsner 108.

²²⁹ Spanish architect (1888-1973), who collaborated with Gaudí in the Sagrada Família and also wrote one of his most important biographies.

²³⁰ César Martinell, *Gaudí his life, his theories, his work*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1967), 385.

²³¹ Subirachs, lecture cited (XXVIII-126), quoted in: Martinell, 386-387.

workshop's ironworks and following the advice of Josep Maria Jujol i Gilbert²³², although always under Gaudí's supervision. Balconies have many visual textures, and movements, because of the different and overlapping iron lines/coats, which sometimes persuade us to visualize seaweeds. In Casa Milà, Gaudí tried "to force metal into such violent expression"²³³. Everything has a specific purpose there; nothing seems random in these wrought-iron pieces.

Other important presences are two gates located in the ground floor. They are very similar and were built with iron and glass, as that in stained-glass, windows but without colour. Their general shape is a big semi-circle, as with many other doors; however, the layout contains an extraordinary, organic, visual movement. There are many metal shapes inside, sometimes circular, sometimes kidney-shaped, dividing the space inside the gates. We can appreciate how "each and every part (...) exudes rhythm and harmony"²³⁴, but not imitating naturalism²³⁵. Instead of copying nature, Gaudí understood it, and created from it.

TWO CONCEPTS WITHIN CASA MILÀ'S FACADE

The most important aspect that interests me is the presence of *abstraction* and *organicity* in Casa Milà's facade, since these play a part in my own creative work as well. However, both concepts are difficult and controversial, especially if we want to define them accurately. Hence, I shall discuss some theoretical features in relation to these notions and then I shall apply these to La Pedrera.

ABSTRACTION

Sometimes the notion of abstract is random and arbitrary, which can produce confusion, but in order to clarify it I will differentiate the notions of representation and the figurative²³⁶. In a quick view, we can understand abstraction just as the absence of the

²³² Spanish architect (1879-1949) and Gaudí's close helper in many projects, such as Park Güell, Casa Batlló and Casa Milà.

²³³ Pevsner 62.

²³⁴ Martinell 387.

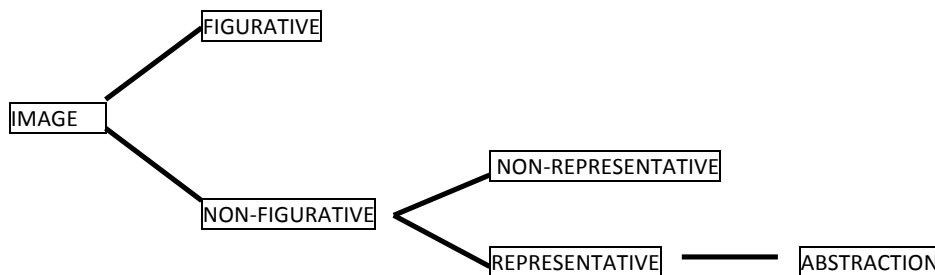
²³⁵ Martinell 387.

²³⁶ Definition of Abstraction based in: Etienne Souriau, *Diccionario AKAL de Estética*, (Madrid: Akal Ediciones, 1998)

figurative, but it is more complex than that. Abstraction also implies extracting something from a whole/reality, to analyse it in isolation.

Representation may or may not be present in a non-figurative piece of work; if it is not, we are discussing in terms of tautology. A non-representative image is univocal²³⁷, as it does not stand for anything in addition to what we can see. Hence, in this context, representation has something behind because it has extracted something from reality (out of different orders, perceptual, affectional, or intellectual).

As a conclusion, an abstraction is a non-figurative form of art, but one that still represents something, (feelings, ideas, for instance), that is to say, the abstract field is non-figurative but representative. The following scheme shows clearly this idea²³⁸



In the context of Modernisme and Gaudí, these facades can be examples:

Figurative:	El Capricho	flowers and plants.
Non-Figurative / Non-Representative:	Casa Vicens	squares and rectangles.
Non-Figurative / Representative:	Casa Milà	waves and movement.

The most organic manifestations in Modernisme are figurative, mainly vegetal motifs. Although the facade's ornamental details in Casa Milà's remind us of nature, with messy sinuous waves and asymmetric shapes, there is no agreement about what they exactly represent. La Pedrera is essentially an abstract work as it represents and evokes nature, sometimes seascapes, sometimes mountains, allowing the viewer to have different visions and interpretations.

²³⁷ Univocal is what presents just one meaning.

²³⁸ Chart adapted from: Souriau 16.

As Frampton states, Gaudi's "achievement seems to have sprung from (...) the compulsion to create a totally new way of expression"²³⁹. There is no doubt about what Frampton means with *a new way of expression*, because Casa Milà is still novel almost one hundred years after it was built. "Seen in retrospect, Casa Milà seems to anticipate something of the ethos of Expressionism that was soon to emerge in Central Europe"²⁴⁰. Also Collins remarks that "the post-war interest in Gaudí here in America accompanied the rise of our own school of abstract expressionism"²⁴¹. In other words, La Pedrera and its expressive power, as well as other works by Gaudí, influenced (directly or indirectly) the history of Western art in terms of abstraction and expressive connotations.

ORGANIC

"Nature does not present to us any object as monotonously uniform"²⁴²

Organic means something close to nature, with both union and internal logic, where the parts and the whole are interconnected. This correlation can be called "organic unity"²⁴³. According to Gans and Kuz, "an organism is a living being consisting of dependent specialised organs, which in their interaction and interdependence determine life processes"²⁴⁴. We can intuit some connections within the whole, "whose parts are mutually dependent or intrinsically related"²⁴⁵, because the "reciprocity of organism and environment defines also the relations of subject to object"²⁴⁶. A constant circulation/exchange between outside and inside is kept within certain limitations²⁴⁷.

Perhaps, the process of abstracting from the images of nature can be close to an organic ideal, as they can evoke something alive. However, for Van Eck, we use the word 'organic' "in a cursory way"²⁴⁸ and she is extremely specific when she explains that the association between Organicism & Gothic revival is a *misunderstanding*. For her, the roots of

²³⁹ Frampton 64.

²⁴⁰ Frampton 66.

²⁴¹ George Collins, *Antoni Gaudí*, (New York: R. R. Donnelly & Sons Company, 1960), 28.

²⁴² Antoni Gaudí, *Ornamentación*, 1878. Gaudí 2002, <http://www.gaudi2002.bcn.es/english/pensam/index.htm>

²⁴³ Van Eck 20.

²⁴⁴ Deborah Gans and Zehra Kuz, (eds), *The organic approach to architecture*, (Chichester: Wiley-Academy, 2003), 95.

²⁴⁵ Gans and Kuz XXIII.

²⁴⁶ Gans and Kuz VIII.

²⁴⁷ Gans and Kuz 50.

²⁴⁸ Van Eck 28.

Organicism are in the early Renaissance, especially with Alberti, Vitruvianism and, before that, through the Greek philosophers²⁴⁹.

From an opposite position, Zevi thinks that “classicism products are completed and are unalterable: organics are works in progress”²⁵⁰. In this context, we can see effectively how complex and almost contradictory the idea of the organic can be. Nevertheless, from my point of view, I believe that it is possible to find organic aspects in different styles and movements through art history, depending on the point of view or on what one is looking for.

In architectural discussions, organic is understood “not as imitative of nature but as analogous of it”²⁵¹, in order to create something both aesthetic and practical. Organic architecture aspires to a superior meaning of function and comfort, articulated by means of simplicity²⁵². In some sense, it could be “the economic creation of built form and space in accordance with the latent principles of nature”²⁵³. As Frampton concludes, “the organic must entail a fundamentally topographic transformation of the site where (...) the distinction between built form and landform becomes blurred”²⁵⁴.

In the next section I am going to examine the transcendence of architect Viollet-le-Duc and his connection with Gaudí and his contemporary Lloyd Wright, in order to grasp the origin of the modern idea of organicity.

ORGANIC ARCHITECTURE IN VIOULET-LE-DUC, GAUDÍ AND WRIGHT

Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc was deeply studied and taught in depth Catalonia, particularly by the Elies Rogent’s School, where Gaudí and Domènech I Montaner studied. Furthermore, he was an important reference for Hector Guimard as well as Victor Horta²⁵⁵. Viollet-le-Duc’s more transcendental ideas were: the understanding of a structural interpretation of the Gothic²⁵⁶, the scientific observation of nature, and the concept of

²⁴⁹ Van Eck 21.

²⁵⁰ Bruno Zevi, *Historia de la Arquitectura Moderna*, (Barcelona: Poseidon, 1980), 275.

²⁵¹ Gans and Kuz XXIII.

²⁵² Frank Lloyd Wright, quoted in Marta Serrats, ed, *Organic Architecture inspired by nature*, (Barcelona: FKG, 2010) 1.

²⁵³ Frampton 190.

²⁵⁴ Frampton 167. It is very interesting how, in this context, Frampton especially criticizes Gehry and his Guggenheim Gallery in Bilbao. Frampton associates it with the society of spectacle, meaning that Gehry does not really apply the organic concept to his creations.

²⁵⁵ They lived during (1867-1942) and (1861-1947) respectively.

Kelmscott Gallery, *Frank Lloyd Wright and Viollet-le-Duc Organic Architecture and Design from 1850-1950*, (Chicago: Kelmscott Gallery, 1986) 8.

²⁵⁶ From each own time and place.

unity²⁵⁷. This means that, among others, “Viollet-le-Duc, (...) laid the cornerstone of modern architecture”²⁵⁸.

Likewise, Frank Lloyd Wright²⁵⁹, who first applied the concept of organic architecture in 1908²⁶⁰, based his theory on the French architect’s philosophy. Even though there are different approaches, countries and periods between Wright and Gaudí, we could consider them as having a similar philosophy because of the common root, in spite of the fact that they applied it to different architectural solutions²⁶¹. In fact, the “concept of organic architecture (is something) that Wright ever actually succeeded in (a real) building”²⁶² and La Pedrera’s facade allows us to feel and appreciate this spontaneously. Nonetheless, it is essential to recognize that through the coherent theoretical work of Wright the legacy of “Viollet-le-Duc has been kept alive”²⁶³. In addition, as Pevsner analyses, Gaudí buildings are “bolder than anything (...) Wright had done”²⁶⁴, primarily because of “their sense of masses in motion and their single-mindedness”²⁶⁵ through their interior and exterior spaces. Although Gaudí and Wright never met, we can say that in some sense their work complements each other’s as tributes to Viollet-le-Duc. “The lasting importance of Viollet-le-Duc’s work lies in the incalculable influence it had on such seemingly disparate practitioners of modern architecture as Wright and Gaudí”²⁶⁶.

I have reviewed a connection between Viollet-le-Duc, Wright and Gaudí with respect to organic architecture, in order to grasp the concept in a better way, and comprehend its meaning in the context of the history of architecture.

Regarding La Pedrera, we can actually see in the facade balconies an interaction between different waves and counterpoints. Indeed, Casa Milà’s structure and ornamentation are worked out as a whole, everything is interconnected.

It is my view that Gaudí’s complete working process is quite organic, because he was always looking for better changes and solutions. This means that he was open to learn through different ways and methodologies, and also to learn from other people. In fact, he

²⁵⁷ Besides, Viollet-le-Duc helped to revive the use of stained glass and wrought iron, which were very important in Gaudí’s building. Kelmscott 8.

²⁵⁸ Kelmscott 7.

²⁵⁹ American architect (1867-1959) who designed the iconic piece of the Fallingwater house.

²⁶⁰ Frampton 188.

²⁶¹ It is clear that styles, materials, visual appearances, aesthetics and the created spaces are completely different.

²⁶² Kelmscott 68.

²⁶³ Kelmscott 7.

²⁶⁴ Pevsner 106.

²⁶⁵ Pevsner 106.

²⁶⁶ Kelmscott 9.

“allowed the possibility of unforeseen future adaptations”²⁶⁷, which made it possible that La Pedrera is still in perfect conditions.

On the other hand, if we appreciate the facade as an image where waves inspire freedom and calm, then it brings in some kind of spirituality, because it is something massive, compact, and solid. Casa Milà has an important presence and solemnity but, at the same time, it is smooth, relaxing, and ludic. Despite the passing of time, it is close to the viewer, as it is impressive and still breaks the rules of tradition. This facade understands the logic of nature, but it is not a narrative reproduction of it, according to what we think of the sea, mountains and the rest. However, it is absolutely impossible to grasp what inspired it. In La Pedrera’s facade we can admire the architecture of light, where luminosity, chiaroscuro, and their consequent sensation of movement arise from volume itself.

²⁶⁷ Martinell 385.

CONCLUSION

This study has analyzed just one of Gaudí's pieces, because each of his artworks is extremely complex, besides being original, and also because there is a fair amount of literature to review for each piece.

Modernisme and Gothic revival²⁶⁸ constitute the context in which Gaudí was born, but his work is not reduced to these frames only; instead, it goes deeper, and beyond these limits. Consequently, we cannot use *Gaudinism* in the same way and meaning for all his pieces, as we can find a different style in each of them. Gaudí is unclassified, he is not only modernist or organicist, he is much more than this. However, he still represents his time and his Catalan identity; since he was not immune to that context and associated external influences, but he always followed mainly his own creativity. In addition, Gaudí's work represents an isolated case of geniality since he did not have disciples who would establish a "school". Another feature is that he developed monumental pieces with a crafts based, open-ended system of work and with a view to possible future changes.

Besides, there is no doubt that it is thanks to Eusebio Güell that we have received most of Gaudí's creations, even if not all of them. This shows that he was free to work for other people and that probably his most important loyalty was to God; this is demonstrated by his commitment to The Sagrada Família. The magnificence of his freedom and creativity is the probable reason why he has fascinated and influenced many architects and artists, which confirms the blurred limits between Architecture and Art in Gaudí's work.

The connections that I have reviewed, amongst Gaudí, Wright, and Viollet-le-Duc confirm Gaudí's approach in terms of innovation, exploration, coherence, and projections. He was inserted in a crucial part of the history of art and architecture.

When considering different expressions of his works, we cannot say that Gaudí is an absolute exponent of Modernisme, although this is true in the case of Casa Milà. Personally, this is one of my favourite works, as it is unpredictable, and as its visual dynamism (produced by random counterpoint) makes it extremely expressionistic. Since an abstract field can be defined as something that is non-figurative but representative, and the characteristics of Casa Milà's facade are within this model, the interpretation of the viewer is fundamental, to connect the abstract expression with their own moods/feelings/sensations.

²⁶⁸ Or Neo- Gothic.

As Frampton observes about organic ideals²⁵⁴, a topographic transformation is what happened in La Pedrera, created by an undifferentiated relationship between the building and its location. This is mainly because of the interconnection of structure, interior, terrace, façade, and corner location. The contrasted alternation between light and shadow, together with the waves and the movement, show an important reciprocity between this building as an organism and its environment. Casa Milà is the best manifestation of the organic architecture in Gaudí's style. After one hundred years of its construction, it is still innovative, and this confirms Zevi's vision about organicism as *work in progress*. La Pedrera seems to be a work continuously in progress, where spectators can keep it, and promote it, with their own imagination.

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