The power of sensuous ideologies in framing the city

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By focusing on two neighbourhoods: Castlefield in Manchester and el Raval in Barcelona I consider in this paper how the production of urban forms has historically been shaped by sensory regimes. I suggest that these reveal the roots of contemporary sensuous paradigms in regenerated public places in form of ideologies that aim to control disorder, impurity and exposure. Because I am interested in the everyday sensuous experience of public spaces I will not offer an ‘ordinary’ historical account but bring out the sensuous history of Castlefield’s and el Raval’s public places in the first part of this paper. I will then provide an overview and analysis of the urban regeneration policies that have led to the spatial transformation of these areas. Both places have re-designed and re-invented their existing public spaces. Both used the construction of major flagship projects: the Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona in el Raval, and the Museum of Science and Industry in Castlefield, to promote new public environments: the Cultural Quarter in el Raval and the Urban Heritage Park in Castlefield. In both cities these new public places paradoxically resembled each other and their policies are based on similar sensory paradigms despite different histories of vernacular public life. Following my hypothesis that urban regeneration has changed the spatial and material structure of these neighbourhoods and thereby has transformed the sensescapes of public spaces, I highlight the power of sensuous ideologies in framing cities.
THE POWER OF SENSUOUS IDEOLOGIES IN FRAMING THE CITY

By focusing on two neighbourhoods: Castlefield in Manchester and el Raval in Barcelona I consider in this paper how the production of urban forms has historically been shaped by sensory regimes. I suggest that these reveal the roots of contemporary sensuous paradigms in regenerated public places in form of ideologies that aim to control disorder, impurity and exposure. To understand the spatial, material, and symbolic transformations of el Raval and Castlefield over time, the neighbourhoods will be briefly contextualised within their historical development. However, I will not offer an ‘ordinary’ historical account but bring out the sensuous history of their public places. Lastly, I provide an overview and analysis of the urban regeneration policies that have led to the spatial transformation of these areas. Following my hypothesis that urban regeneration is changing the spatial and material structure of these neighbourhoods and thereby transforming the sensescapes of public spaces, I aim to bring out the sensory paradigms informing these policies.

SENSUOUS IDEOLOGIES

Writers such as Corbin (1986), Classen (1994) and Synnott (1991) highlight that the senses have a history as much as they have influenced social history. Through a careful analysis of French scientific discourse and literature Corbin (1986) illustrates that despite the Enlightenment and the increasing dominance of sight in elaborating scientific discourse, smell featured crucially in medical and public health theories of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the eighteenth century it was feared that illness and death could travel through bad air, as putrid odour was considered to be the materialisation of miasma. Consequently ventilation, the creation of spatial distance and the uncrowding of places was regarded as preventing illness, and the deoderisation of public space became both an outcome and proof of control of currents of air. However, later in the 19th century a major shift occurred which equalised foul smell not only with illness but with filth, dirt, poverty and misery. Strong odours came associated with a lower social class and linked to the fear of odours became associations of disgust and repulsion. The working classes were associated with fetidity and dirt, ‘the secretions of poverty’ regarded as stemming from their social disorder and non-disciplined behaviour. These perceptions of smell would influence the physical organisation of cities and neighbourhoods.

During the eighteenth century the major concern of city planners in European cities such as Paris or Barcelona was to ‘ventilate’ cities. Old city walls were overthrown, hospitals, businesses that caused unpleasant smells were located outside city walls and roads were widened. This was also linked to the increased importance given to visual perspectives during the Renaissance to order space:

“[t]he towns obvious functional qualities, the separation of its buildings, and its symmetric design, which also corresponded at least partially, to a requirement of hygiene, ensured that the town was not only salubrious but also immediately comprehensible and visually pleasing to onlookers.” (Corbin 1986: 100)

City reformers supported the idea that sunshine and the circulation of air purified. Hausman’s town planning, for example, could be regarded at aiming to eliminate the darkness of the centre of the city (Corbin 1986). Linked to this perception was the notion that olfactory sensibility, or the lack of it, equated with civilised behaviour versus animalistic behaviour. Hence,
increasingly it became of interest for the ruling classes to spatially separate themselves from the unruly lower classes, which were perceived to live amongst, and emanate, strong odours. For the bourgeois the city was divided into places where they could give themselves to the enjoyment of perception, where nothing offended the senses as opposed to the ‘non-city’ or disordered city where the dirty, the poor, the malodorous existed. Gradually smell defined the social order and played a determinant role in the management of urban space.

The aim of this short account of the social history of smell is to highlight three points. First, that senses are never neutral but their meaning and what emphasis we lay on them is shaped by society. We can conclude from this that the ‘reality’ a culture accepts is closely related to the ways it defines its sensuous experience and therefore senses can play a hegemonic role in establishing geographical meaning (Rodaway 1994). Second, that giving priority to a certain sense, as shown in the above example, is linked to a particular worldview and experience of space. Thus, in Corbin’s (1986) account, we can appreciate how a focus on smells, informed a public discourse concerned with currents, circulation, air which was reflected in the conceived representations of space in city planning. Third, the behaviour of the upper classes in the nineteenth century shows how our expectations of public space and fostered spatial practices are closely bound to the sensuous geography established by each society. Sensuous geographies are not ‘natural’ but discursive constructs which inform our views and relationships with particular places and are negotiated in everyday life. Context bound behaviour is linked to certain presuppositions and norms about what kind of sensuous experiences are allowed and expected in public. There are certain assumptions about what is permissible to see, hear, feel, smell in a public space. And, as the above discussion of smell implies, expectations of sensuous geographies are important elements in the construction and maintenance of social order in place.

However, what determines the right ‘order’? Inherent in the notion of order is, as Douglas (1966) pointed out in her groundbreaking analysis, the notion of ‘purity’ or cleanliness. Hence what makes spaces ordered is that they are regarded as pure, dirt on the other hand creates ‘disorder’:

“ [...] dirt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder. If we shun dirt, it is not because of craven fear, still less dread or holy terror. Nor do our ideas about disease account for the range of our behaviour in cleaning and avoiding dirt. Dirt offends against order. Eliminating is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment.” (Douglas 1966: 2)

Douglas’ definition of dirt links sensuous experience, mainly visual and tactile, with the environment: by eliminating unwanted sensuous experiences and re-structuring sensuous experience we order our surroundings, we construct ‘pure’, clean environments. Thus, implicit in schemes of perception which ‘order place’ are intrinsic ideological dimensions, as they delineate what is the right order, what is pure, what is impure – what is considered ‘dirt’.

In his study of ‘geographies of exclusion’ Sibley (1995) takes this point one step further and illustrates how associations, images of places and the perception of their inhabitants are informed by broader cultural discourses of purity which lead to subtle spatial exclusionary practices and are shaped by those in power. While he indicates that there is a tendency by every individual to reject difference and search for order he argues that this tendency is reinforced by institutional controls and broader social discourses that exclude ‘matter out of place’ (Douglas 1966). It is the latter point which this article aims to illustrate. For Sibley (1995), exclusionary practices are often based on particular notions of purity that regard dirt as imperfect and inferior:
“Exclusionary discourse draws particularly on colour, disease, animals, sexuality and nature, but they all come back to the idea of dirt as a signifier of imperfection and inferiority, the reference point being the white, often male, physically and mentally able person.” (1995: 14)

Referring back to Douglas, Sibley argues that the people, animals and things which do not fit into the groups classification scheme are those which are considered as ‘impure’, or in other words are polluting the environment through their mere presence, thus secreting sensory pollution. People themselves are regarded as ‘carriers’ of threatening disorder or acting as mobile ‘dark spaces’ which explains why much city planning involves the control of spatial movement and spatial segregation. Hence, the above described attempts at ordering the city can also be interpreted as forms of purifying the city, designed to exclude groups identified as sensuously polluting.

From this discussion we reach following conclusion. Namely, that notions of impurity are linked to spatial order as social hierarchies are played out in space through the employment of negative or positive sensory associations which define who and what is pure or impure. This suggests that sensory associations or descriptions are techniques of power which determine who is allowed or is barred from a place. For the rest of this section I discuss what I consider as the third important ideology that has shaped the sensuous landscape of the city: the fear of exposure.

Lofland famously stated that “a city's public space is the locus of the world of strangers” (1973: 20). The city is a place of ‘exposure’ to the Other, to the unknown and unfamiliar. However, as already suggested in the preceding discussion of order and purity in the city, relations in the city are permeated and shaped by social hierarchies. Anonymity, the exposure to the stranger, the unknown, rather than being regarded as a positive element in the city is most of the times linked with feelings of fear and the need for control. Therefore, as Ellin (1997a, 1997b) has recently argued the form and planning of the city is shaped by notions of fear and safety in society. Initially, from antiquity to renaissance, the city was conceived as a ‘safe place’, exterior walls protected the citizens from outside invaders. Since the advent of industrialisation however, and the associated changing social, economic and political circumstances, the city itself has been increasingly associated with internal dangers. This is linked with broader changes and feelings of insecurity that industrialisation and the move to modernity brought, where traditional structures and institutions start to stumble and, as Berman remarks, “all that is solid melts into air” (1986). Hence, not surprisingly the beginning of the 19th century witnessed the start of zoning, an attempt to rationalise and order space by determining the nature of the built form. Rationalisation had inevitable effects on the character of public space which became more functional, as for example, streets were replaced from being spaces for long encounters to become places of movement. Similarly, Modernist design which favoured isolated towers and mass produced individual housing can be interpreted as an ambition of planners to neutralise strangerhood and exposure. The city is viewed as a space that should discourage close physical encounters with strangers: “The decorporealised space described by a fear of touching is a space dominated by the eye, where the body and tactile reality are extinguished by the dominance of visuality” (Diken 1998: 72).

In fact, the assurance of safety has become one of the most important features of contemporary regenerated spaces (Newman 1972; Davis 1990, 1999). As Davis (1990,1999) analysis of Los Angeles shows: design, architecture and the police apparatus merge, designers and architects are becoming, or have always been, as the above discussion on Paris implies,
experts in security. It is generally believed that fear can be designed out (Newman 1972) by defining and protecting the boundaries of an environment that keeps strangers at bay. This was and is achieved by manipulating the design of objects in a particular space so that it does not afford unwanted practices and experiences by marginal groups of society.

As much as society is transforming, fears are changing too. This ‘new’ fear, termed by Ellin (1997b) as ‘postmodern fear’, needs to be understood as a response to the above discussed acceleration of social changes since the 1960s and rise of what has been described as postmodern insecurities. Linked to the emergence of a ‘control society’ (Deleuze), postmodern fear suggests that danger cannot be contained in a specific place anymore, it cannot be located and ‘disciplined’, but is everywhere (Degen 2003). Thus one has to protect oneself constantly against potential danger. But how does this ‘postmodern fear’ relate to the shaping of regenerated urban environments? Two aspects in particular are relevant in this article: the militarization of landscape and the use of history to regenerate neighbourhoods.

In terms of the militarization of landscape Davis’ (1999) highlights especially three characteristics relevant for shaping the sensory power relations of the environment in his recent description of Los Angeles. First, the development of a ‘scanscape’ based on the implementation of a network of technologised sensory systems used for surveillance, from CCTV cameras to infra-red or heat sensitive cameras. Here the technologisation of the senses is taken to its extreme and used to control spatially an environment without any human intervention. Second, the increase of ‘vigilantopolis’, which refers to the rise of self-organised neighbourhood-watch schemes, often in collaboration with the police. In ‘vigilantopolis’ control and fear are pervasive features, the landscape is constantly observed from windows and portals. Strangers or unknown behaviour are prone to be suspicious and criminalized. Third, the development of a new species of enclaves in Los Angeles, social control districts, which are distinguished according to their juridical modes of imposing spatial discipline. The common theme of these juridical modes is that they link criminal or civil codes with land use planning and therefore can legally exclude or contain ‘undesirable’ groups in certain areas, and abate or enhance laws to pursue particular spatial practices. The important message of all these different modes of imposing spatial order is that the “social control district strategy penalises individuals even in the absence of a criminal act, merely for group membership. ‘Status criminalisation’, moreover, feeds off middle class fantasies about the nature of the dangerous classes” (Davis 1999: 386).

A maybe less obvious way of combating postmodern fear is the use of history emphasised by the use of heritage and recycling past urban forms in regenerated areas. As Ellin (1997b) explains this is linked to escapism and nostalgic visions of a ‘golden age’ in which fear is not perceived to exist. The reasons why historical environments or heritage are used to give a sensation of security are various. The aim of urban heritage schemes is a particular re-framing of urban reality (Boyer 1992). The immediate present is ignored, as well as the uncomfortable realities of the past, thus both past and present problems are simultaneously erased and ignored in the idealised city tableaux. For Boyer these places “are true non-places, hollowed out human remnants, without connection to the rest of the city or the past, waiting to be filled with contemporary fantasias, colonised by wishful projections and turned into spectacles of consumption” (1992: 191). Nevertheless, a common characteristic of regenerating through heritage is that the historic monuments are renovated, sandblasted, stripped of the sensuous indicators of age such as dirt, moss, traces of environmental pollution to fit in with the new buildings and the contemporary character of the area. The past is incorporated into a hygienised vision of the present. A consequence is that the sensuous experiences of past and present become very much alike and as these regeneration projects are implemented in a vast number of cities in Europe one could argue that the city landscape is becoming an increasing
homogenised experience (Sudjic 1992). These environments are homogenised as much in terms of use, architecture and sensuous experience as in terms of the people that are attracted to them. People, so developers argue, feel safer with like-minded people (Davis 1990). This like-mindedness is most of the time defined by their acquisition potential and non-consumption is constructed as a form of deviance (Sibley 1995). However, it is often not clear what the fear is about - an imagined Other, a stranger - and is simplified into a generalised social perception of threat that becomes the function of security mobilization (Davis 1990).

In the above I have laid out what I consider the most pertinent sensuous ideologies shaping the planning of western cities: the control of disorder, impurity and exposure. I argue that the construction of urban place is not only a geographical, or political economic matter but that it also intersects with socio-cultural expectations, in particular with social perceptions of the senses. Thus, the conceptions of space, the spatial practices and lived experiences in space are marked by the senses and inform each other. The discussion highlights moreover, that the sensory experience of places is deeply intertwined with the stereotypes associated with social groups using that space and which leads to a reinforcement of the characterisation of this space.

A SENSUOUS HISTORY

Two opposing features characterise both el Raval’s and Castlefield’s position in their sensuous history: centrality and marginality. Centrality historically because both neighbourhoods were the cradles of the industrial revolution in their respective countries, at this time Manchester was referred to as ‘Cottonopolis’ and Barcelona as the ‘Manchester of the South’. And, centrality in terms of their crucial position next to the city centre which makes them desirable places for real estate development. As a consequence, similar urban patterns emerge in both neighbourhoods: densely built and inhabited areas with factories, warehouses and squalid working class housing. They were at the same time marginal areas were the cities residual activities and institutions were located: abattoirs with their putrefying smells, hospitals filled with potential infectious diseases and other charitable institutions that provided shelter for the unwanted. These developments lead to their other feature: marginalisation, resulting precisely from their dense urban development, and the location of the cities residual activities and institutions in these neighbourhoods. These were sensuously engaging places where intense experiences: noise, odours, tactile encounters on the street created a space in which the pedestrian was involved in rich sensuous experiences whilst carrying on their everyday lives. One can tell from looking at old nineteenth century paintings and prints that both areas have traditionally been depicted as dark, oppressing places which clouded the streets with foul smelling fumes and where neither the noise of machines nor the workforce ever abated. On the other hand, one can appreciate from photographs, historic documents and novels how the high levels of working class population and poor housing - which did not invite residents to stay inside – promoted a busy street-life. Yet, one can perceive the power of bourgeois spatial ordering shunning the impure as both areas were gradually hidden behind ‘panel buildings’ in the late 19th century that would disguise the existence of poverty, dense and degraded housing conditions and increase their physical and psychological isolation from the city centre.

Both neighbourhoods working class and industrial character were soon accompanied by prostitution and related entertainment businesses which made them in the public imagination during the early 20th century places of eroticism and carnivalesque Castlefield becoming Manchester’s neighbourhood for fairs, markets and prostitution and el Raval becoming the
infamous ‘Barrio Chino’ the entertainment and prostitution centre of Barcelona. This gave these areas, at least for a while, quite a bohemian and permissive character that operated in opposition to the bourgeois powers of the city, as el Raval for example was often compared to Paris’ Montmartre. The other side of this romanticised version was the lived reality of these neighbourhoods: lack of sanitary devices, precariously built housing and, especially in el Raval, a density of people compared to Calcutta.

With the decay of industrialisation, a civil war followed by dictatorship in Spain and Britain’s involvement in a World War, el Raval and Castlefield slowly decayed. They became neighbourhoods where the sensescapes reflect loss, however marked by different attributes. Before the regeneration process started in the late 1980s, while still densely inhabited, el Raval is a socially marginal neighbourhood a sensuously dangerous and stale place with decadent housing. This is reflected in “closed metallic shutters of bars and commerce, and the abundant flyers advertising flat rental, and in the hostels that were working as ‘hot beds’, called like that because the clients took turns in the rooms all the 24 hours of the day” (Villar 1996: 230). Public space becomes insecure because of the visible activities of drug dealers and related crime. Castlefield on the other hand is a sensuously abandoned place, with hardly any residents, no activity on its streets, crumbling paths and buildings that are overrun by nature, the only sound is that of guard dogs, and the air is filled with the smell of stale canals and rotting wood. The dominant sensescapes of the time inform the social imaginary of the place. In both cases their past spatial and geographical centrality does not correspond with an integration into the city in present times. Hence, just before their regeneration, both places were physically difficult spaces to access for outsiders: Castlefield because there were no public pathways, el Raval because outsiders did not dare to enter the labyrinthine streets which would draw the outsider ever deeper into el Raval. Those that managed to enter where faced with oppressive sensuous gestures created by squalid conditions, poor lighting and putrid odours, with few public spaces. One of the main aims of the regeneration was to reverse the physical and psychological confinement of these spaces and open up the neighbourhood for the rest of the city and visitors.

**THE REGENERATION PROCESS**

Both areas regeneration process developed out of a similar impetus: the prospective of each city holding the Olympic Games and therefore the need for neighbourhoods in or near the city centre to be refurbished and re-imagined to be presented to a global audience. While both areas have very different development histories: Castlefield’s re-discovery was framed around historical value, thus creating a Urban Heritage Park that celebrated Manchester’s industrial past and which features a Science and Industry Museum. El Raval’s re-invention was based on creating Barcelona’s new cultural quarter filled with art galleries and modern art museums, I will show that the process of regeneration itself – starting in the late 80s is based on similar spatial ideologies.
Castlefield

In 1988 the Central Manchester Development Corporation (CMDC) was appointed to become the key agency in developing Manchester’s city centre. The CMDC inherited an area, which had already received public investment of £ 7 million and was in the process of moving away from its decadent past. Despite that, the area had not succeeded in attracting any national or international private investment because “of its poor environment and the very high costs of treating its many protected buildings and derelict and contaminated sites. The primary reason for setting up the CMDC was to remove or reduce these barriers” (Grigor 1995: 63).

The CMDC aimed to develop the tourist potential by promoting a European lifestyle theme by fostering Castlefield’s outdoor activities: enhancing its canals, creating an open air Event Arena (a vast 3500 square metre stage for events and performance), promoting regular street markets and inaugurating a Catalan Square, an outcome of Manchester’s and Barcelona’s informal relationships, as well as supporting bars that would offer a Mediterranean cuisine. The marketing of leisure space became a key strategy for Castlefield’s regeneration, transforming an empty place into an active place. The following description evokes its atmosphere:

“Catalan Square is now a thriving, lively centre of Manchester’s social scene - with an especially Spanish flavour. Nestled under some of Britain’s oldest railway arches and surrounded by canals, the centrepiece of the Square is the trendy new cafe-bar BARÇA, with its glass frontage overlooking the terrace-and on the terrace, the largest seat in Manchester- the golden circular sun. Throughout the summer, hundreds of outdoor pleasure seekers can be seen every evening in the Square, draped on and around the sun of Mediterranean [sic.], glasses in hand, meeting friends, watching buskers and soaking up the atmosphere.” (Tucker 1997, page number omitted)

It is important to highlight how the sensory perceptions: glasses in hand (tastescape), meeting friends (touchscape), watching buskers and people (visual and audioscape); in other words, the sensuous rhythms of the re-designed area are described as Castlefield’s competitive advantages.

In 1996 Castlefield fell again under the jurisdiction of the Manchester Council and was incorporated into a number of parallel planning strategies for the City Centre. The main priority of these plans was to promote inner city living by enhancing the physical environment of the city centre. This was achieved through three strategies that concerned public space:

a) sustainable development, that focuses on making the cities into more attractive locations to live and work in;

b) promotion of mixed uses, which is seen as an encouragement of vitality and diversity in the city, the guiding idea is the concept of ‘urban village’;

c) design*

Great weight is given in these guides to the conscious development of the city’s material landscape, its spatial re-design:

“We have concluded that the creation of a quality townscape can be an important instrument in enhancing everyone’s sense of well being, encouraging the more intensive use of different buildings and spaces both in commercial and residential areas. This is why the Guide places great emphasis on making the City more user friendly, easy to understand and secure. It can be made more so by opening areas up to as many groups of users as possible and by creating a shared sense of its different spaces.” (Guide to Development in
Manchester 1997: 7)

This quote illustrates the ubiquitousness of the argument made above where it is suggested that power structures in a control society operate through the manipulation of the built environment and by transforming everyday life and practices. The policy is set out to provide citizens with a feeling of well-being which is associated with the creation of an environment that provides a sense of security. Emphasized is the accessibility of public spaces as places for engagement, a move away from the city as an anonymous place, especially highlighted in the following street-description: “Streets should be designed as places for people to meet. The street should be a public space which promotes socialization” (A Guide to Development in Manchester 1997: 26). The success of public spaces is measured by the provision of the visual legibility of Manchester - its architecture and design - both in terms of attracting people to use the streets and squares and in terms of providing it with an identity. This strategy supports the argument made by critics of the increased manipulation and technologisation of vision in the ‘aestheticisation of everyday life’ in late modernity. The enjoyment of public space is reduced in such accounts to its visual appeal:

“What a city looks and feels like is a crucial part of its identity. If people are to enjoy places, they should be visually interesting. Manchester contains many remarkable buildings which give it a unique sense of identity. [...] Landmarks help people to orient themselves and find their way around: vistas create visual links both within and outside the area and draw people along a street. The Guide encourages outdoor spaces which are stimulating yet remain comfortable and human in scale; spaces which at all times are clearly defined and serve a useful purpose.” (A Guide to Development in Manchester 1997: 13)

However, when analysed more closely a number of paradoxes appear in this quote. While on the one hand, places should foster visual interest and diversity, on the other hand, social diversity is feared and needs to be restrained. One could argue that while the visual senses play a determinant role, the other senses, especially touch and smell are regarded as dangerous and need to be regulated; this is implied in the phrase “stimulating yet comfortable”. Thus spontaneity, the unexpected - inherent features of public life - are regarded as negative and threatening to the overall sense of well being. In these documents public life and spaces are regarded as products that can be manufactured and organised according to visions of planners. As stated in the above quote, public space should be “clearly defined and serve a useful purpose”, which implies single use public space and throws up questions about who determines what is a “useful purpose”. The concept of mixed-use fits into Manchester’s marketing of a European café culture, and helps to address issues of passive surveillance on the streets, resulting in an increase of personal security. The discourse of fear and crime is used to defend the surveillance of public places, illustrating Zukin’s point that “the streets are both aestheticized and feared as a source of urban culture” (1995: 267).

Nowadays Castlefield has an average of 1000 residents, mostly childless couples and single people from the middle classes: academics, doctors, lawyers, and so on who live in newly built flats or regenerated warehouses. Castlefield has become a flagship-project for Manchester and inherent in most interviews held with planners is a sense of “Castlefield is what Manchester should be like.” Thus, one can conclude that the regeneration strategies have been successful in manufacturing a public life in the area. However, it remains to be examined what kind of public life has been created.

El Raval
El Raval’s re-design had already been attempted several times, most famously by the GATPAC group, but never accomplished. However, the buildings in the areas under threat of demolition were abandoned by their landlords and houses and their inhabitants were left much to their own devices which explains the overall neglect of el Raval’s built environment in the late 20th century.

The first step to regenerate the Old City in the 1980s, which el Raval is part of, was to design three ‘Special Plans for Interior Reconstruction’ (PERI) to redevelop internally each district with the participation of neighbourhood associations. The PERIs were conceptualised during el Raval’s darkest period of social marginalisation with its manifold social problems: drug dealing, crime, street prostitution, general poverty, and lack of social institutions. For this reason el Raval’s PERI emphasised the idea that the transformation of the urban form would lead to a solution to social problems. A further expectation was that the physical transformation would change the negative perception of the area as a no-go area for Barcelona’s citizens.

El Raval’s PERI had three main aims. First of all, and in line with Barcelona’s overall policy, the creation of new public spaces. Rather than pursuing a comprehensive slum clearance, the method used to obtain new open spaces was referred to as ‘esponjamiento’, meaning that similar to a sponge, small air-holes would be created in this densely built up neighbourhood. This implied the destruction of the most degraded parts of the neighbourhood to obtain little squares while keeping the existent urban fabric. The second aim was to use existent public buildings to provide the neighbourhood with a better level of public infrastructures (such as old people’s homes, and social centres amongst others) and to help to promote a better quality of life for its inhabitants. The third aim was to promote a general rehabilitation or substitution of housing, which would lead to an acceptable standard of sanitation in the district as well as creating new public housing (PERI del Raval 1983, Sust 1986). Other aims were those of fostering urban security and promoting the area economically, culturally and touristically.

The PERI divided el Raval into two areas with different planning aims. The northern part of el Raval described as “Del Liceo al Seminari” (From the Opera House to the Seminary) based on a cultural regeneration. And, the southern Raval: “El Plan Central” (The Central Plan), was based on Franco’s urban renewal plans that aimed to penetrate the neighbourhood with a broad avenue – a second Ramblas - and focus on enhancing commerce, economic renewal along this avenue as well as provide this area with more social institutions. The regeneration was expected to expand concentrically from the heart of the neighbourhood: first, by creating a cultural enclave and second, by the gradual bulldozing, in Haussmannian fashion, a boulevard into the southern neighbourhood.

In line with the aim of cities to develop their symbolic economy, the objective for the northern Raval was to attract new cultural uses and activities to a zone with a large amount of empty ‘container buildings’ (such as charity houses, hospitals, convents). These cultural activities were expected to spill out from new university faculties re-located in the area, new research centres, the Centre of Contemporary Culture of Barcelona (an exhibition space and research centre) housed in a former city orphanage and the flagship museum: The Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona (MACBA) designed by the North-American architect Richard Meier which opened in 1995. Similarly to Castlefield’s Science and Industry Museum, it was expected to serve as a catalyst for the neighbourhood’s regeneration as it was expected to encourage Barcelona's citizens and tourists into el Raval and serve to boost the city’s image around the world (McNeil 1999).

The planning literature and documents is filled with the use of a medical discourse that describes el Raval as an ill patient that needs to be operated upon, for example: “a surgery
model is chosen that eliminates the non-recuperable” (Ferrer 1997: 68). This medical discourse is linked to a discourse of ‘hygiene’ to refer to the regeneration of degenerated areas mainly located in the south. As discussed above, the notion of purity or in this case ‘health’ in city planning is linked to the creation of a social order as social hierarchies are played out in space. Hence, this hygiene discourse relates much, as the rest of this study will show, to the sensuous transformation of perceived ‘sick’ or ‘impure’ areas. The degraded zones and activities need to be cut out as they are in danger of infecting (sensuously) the new regenerated zones. This is a sensuous expression of power. De Certeau and Giard conclude:

“Renovation participates in the medicalization of power [...] This power is becoming more and more a ‘nursing power’. It takes responsibility for the health of the social body and thus for its mental, biological or urban illnesses [...]” (1998: 139)

A clear example of the power played out in this hygienic attitude is reflected in the demolition of whole blocks of houses which contained 1,384 dwellings and 293 commercial premises to construct the new Rambla of el Raval (La Vanguardia 28/4/98). The consequence was the disappearance of el Raval’s ‘hardest’ streets, the key spaces of prostitution and drug dealing. Similarly to Castlefield, the physical landscape serves here as a symbol for deviancy and the need for social control. The underlying assumption is that a regenerated public space, meaning here a ‘ordered’, ‘pure’ space, will improve the social behaviour of its residents which implies a social categorisation of the resident population as inferior, marginal and uncivilised. This serves to legitimise the domination or transformation of the space and portray the transformation as a natural logic, or as it is portrayed in el Raval, as having “a social objective, namely to resolve the problems of an area that was degenerated” (planner L). According to this planner the degeneration of the neighbourhood was caused by the ‘darkness’ of the neighbourhood and the lack of public space: “It was a situation in which the sun never entered, where there are no areas where the children could play, and then of course they did other things in the neighbourhood but play. These urban changes have a lot to do with the social improvement of the area. It also helps other groups to enter. Before few people would have settled down in the Old City and the very moment we change conditions people come back.” (planner L)

Therefore, lighting up the area or as the regeneration marketing slogan: “In el Raval the sun is coming in!” was a key strategy reflected spatially in the widening of streets, the creation of new public spaces, and visually in the sandblasting of buildings. Moreover ‘designing out’ the ‘fear’ was achieved by permeating the area with new activities aimed at gradually diluting the existing public life, equalise the status of the area in relation to the rest of the city, remove its present distinguishing features so outsiders can start entering it, through the replacement of a prostitution zone by a cultural and university site (Garcia 1998). The construction of university buildings and student housing is described as a strategic action, as “the addition of new users to this part of the city has neutralised the old marginal activities” (Ajuntament de Barcelona 1996). One of the first actions by the city councils to stop non-desired activities was to issue in 1992 a policy to control the activities of the area: “Plan de Usos” (Plan of Uses). Similar to Davis (1999) description of Los Angeles social control districts, this was really a policy against brothels, lodgings and bars, thus a legal strategy to impose a particular spatial discipline. It is important to remember the key social roles that brothels, lodging houses and similar businesses had in this neighbourhood: take in and offer shelter to immigrants (increasingly illegal ones from outside the European Union); and provide places where prostitution could take place. By destroying these ‘undercover’ spaces of reception, transitional residents and the illegal, non-registered population of el Raval was reduced and more controllable. In the view of a planner this leads to a ‘normalisation’ of the area: “...the fact that el Raval is becoming normalised also encourages
people to get to know it, they loose fear and start entering its corners, its places.” (Mr. E).
Normalization is here related to the planning ideologies discussed before. Firstly, dispelling impurity (letting the sun in) and secondly, controlling social disorder by assuring Barcelona’s citizens a socially homogeneous public space, in Davis (1990) words: the filtering out of ‘undesirables’.

The reputation or symbolic image of el Raval has been improved since 1990 through continuous promotional campaigns by the regeneration bodies by campaigns such as: “Athens? Berlin? Milan? This weekend, el Raval!” and which are geared to modify citizens’ and residents’ perceptions to explain the attractive elements of Barcelona’s historic centre: the combination of history and new designer culture. The main emphasis of the campaign lies on discovering el Raval’s unexpected and unknown historic richness “[h]idden most of the times underneath a thick cover of neglect, of dirt - also metaphoric - of flagrant degradation” (Gabancho 1991: 18). Linked to the need to change el Raval’s reputation is a discourse of urban restructuring strongly associated with the increased security of the place. Gradually more Barcelonians are venturing into el Raval and the numbers of tourists have certainly increased, however not in the expected numbers.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter has been to examine the sensuous history of these neighbourhoods and contextualise current regeneration strategies within that past. My historical analysis shows that these neighbourhoods did not lack public places before the regeneration but that a discourse of marginality and negative perception was constructed both in the media and planning documents. While it is not the aim of this research to judge the truth of these discourses, they were needed to defend the radical physical and sensory transformation of the neighbourhood. This furthermore has lead to an image construction of the future of the neighbourhoods that promotes an urban lifestyle associated with the regeneration which implies that only regenerated areas are desirable areas. I concluded that the regeneration strategies of these two areas were faced with similarities in that both areas were considered as ‘marginal areas’ and did not receive any financial investment for a long time. Yet, Castlefield and el Raval were very different in that the first was an empty area, while el Raval had a large population. Both neighbourhoods had to change the perception of their public places through the creation of new public places and a manipulation of existent ones, however the regeneration implemented different strategies. El Raval, densely inhabited, needed to change the perception of its public places by replacing one form of public life by another, thus expelling unwanted activities and people and attracting new activities and new people. It involved sensuously cleansing its public places. Castlefield, on the other hand, needed to consciously produce ‘a public life’ to bring people and activities into an empty area, rationally engineering an attractive sensescape.

To achieve their aim both regeneration strategies have been based upon public-private partnerships. Their regeneration strategies are marked by a conscious focus on environmental improvement of public space that seeks to change the perception or image of the place and attract new socio-spatial practices. Thus, in Castlefield the regeneration is focused on leisure, office development, the attraction of inner city living by developing residential spaces and a leisurisation of space. El Raval’s regeneration is shaped by an emphasis on tourism, culture, the attraction of government and research institutions into the area, the transformation of housing by either rehabilitation or demolition expressed in a sanitation of space. Hence, while Castlefield has become a flagship-project for Manchester and symbolises the European lifestyle
and vibrancy that the city of Manchester wants to promote, El Raval, is still a sore thumb in Barcelona and one could say that it is being ‘made up’ to fit in the overall image of Barcelona as a fashionable, forward looking 21st century European city. We can conclude that the sensory paradigm is an important feature for the regeneration of public spaces. It is believed that a sensuous-physical transformation of public places can re-generate the public life in these neighbourhoods.
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1 In his analysis of public spaces in the late British Victorian town, Croll (1999) describes the unpredictable appearance of ‘unwelcome characters’ (often associated with the poor) in middle class areas, or the high street as mobile ‘dark spaces’ and refers to the difficulty of constructing a meaningful moral geography of the streets.

2 While Los Angeles might be considered an extreme example, it can be “presented as part of a much more extensive transformation of the spatial specificities of urbanism that is affecting many other cities and regions, making the harsh particularities of the Los Angeles case relevant to a more general and comprehensive understanding of contemporary urban life everywhere” (Soja 2000: 301).

3 See for example L.S. Lowry for Manchester and A. Guesden for el Raval.

4 Design, is defined as “the relationship between different buildings; the relationship between buildings and the streets, squares, parks, waterways and spaces which make up the public domain itself; the relationship of one part of a village, town or city with other parts; and the patterns of movement and activity that are thereby established: in short, the complex relationships between all the elements of built and unbuilt space” (The Manchester Plan First Monitoring Report 1997: 7).

5 GATPAC stands for Grupo d’Arquitectes i Tecnics Catalans per al Progress De l’Arquitectura Contemporanea.

6 In 1991, 45% of its population earns 500,000 pts (2300£) a year, 29% earn 1 million pts (4600 £) and 13.5% earn 1.5 million pts (6900£) (Gabancho 1991).

7 In 1980 only 3% of the housing has all basic services (gas, water, electricity, heating, bathroom, toilet).

8 This policy did not allow the renewal of licences for sex, leisure businesses on streets narrower than 5 metres (thus it affected most streets of the southern Raval) arguing that ambulances could not enter the area. Furthermore only certain areas were restricted to house bars, sex and leisure establishments. New sex businesses had to be located within a pre-determined distance.