



DOCTORAL THESIS

**THE VISUALIZATION
OF A NATION:
TÀPIES AND CATALONIA**

Emily Jenkins

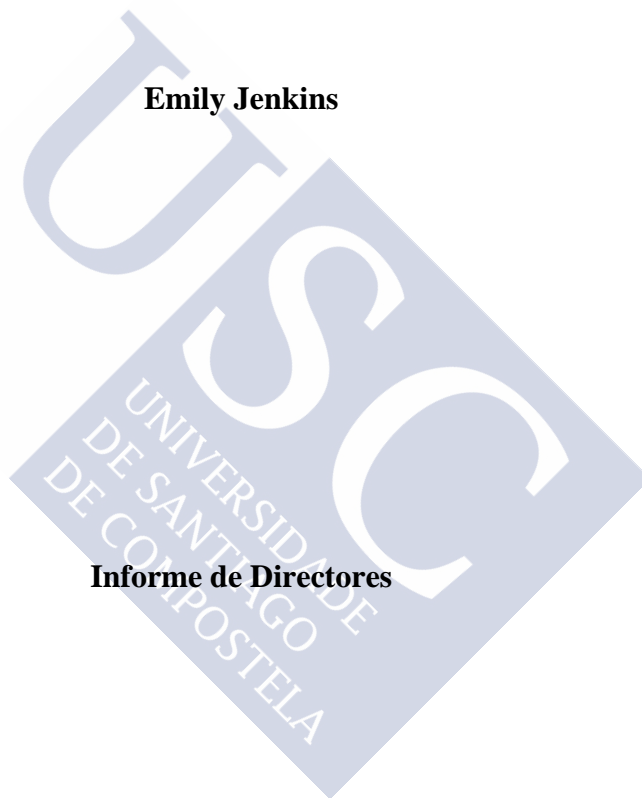
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On March 23, 1981 Jordi Pujol gave a speech regarding the exhibition *Catalunya Avui*. The President of the Generalitat proudly expressed the artistic wealth of Catalonia, reminding the audience that when they hear of Tàpies, Miró, Dalí, and even Picasso they ought to remember their Catalan heritage. For Pujol in the 1980s, Tàpies had already made his mark as an important figure within *el poble Català*. In 2014, after a referendum regarding Catalan independence, Artur Mas spoke to the press about the event. He was photographed in a room with Tàpies's enormous painting *Les quatre cròniques* (1990) looming in the background. In a political climate dramatically different from when the painting was created, the image took on new meanings. This investigation analyzes Tàpies's style, the institutional support that he received, the historical context of his artistic exhibitions, and the bilateral relationship between politics and art.



Emily Jenkins



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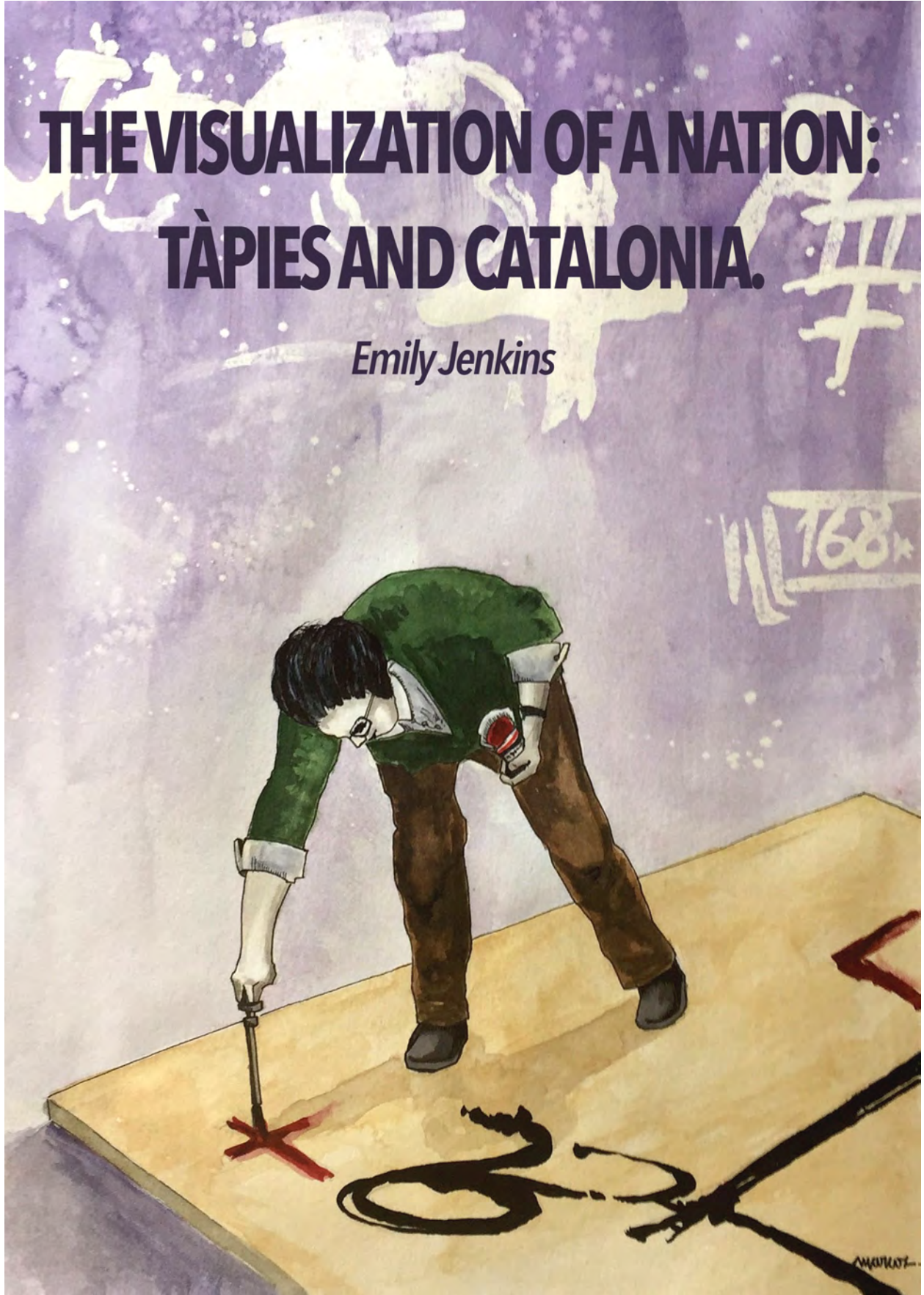
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THE VISUALIZATION OF A NATION: TÀPIES AND CATALONIA.

Emily Jenkins





Acknowledgements

*“Què fem? On enem? D’on venim?
Però aquí tenim una caixa de llapis de colors.”*

Joan Brossa

While this investigation would have been impossible without the guidance and insight of a number of excellent professors, colleagues, friends, and family, I take full responsibility for any errors within this text. When asked about my research, I am met with a number of different reactions. Some ask me what the artwork of Tàpies looks like, others ask why anyone would study Catalan nationalism, and a few say it sounds fascinating. This journey began in 2008 at a FC Barcelona soccer match where the omnipresence of the Catalan flag waving around the stadium stuck me as extraordinary. Growing up in the United States, the only comparison I could contrive was attending a Boston Celtic’s basketball game and seeing the audience swaggering their Massachusetts flags. This simply does not happen. Studying art and nationalism in Spain has led me to corners of the country that I never thought I would go. It has been an incredible adventure, particularly as I learned the Spanish language (*de golpe*), and I am indebted to many who have helped me along the way.

To Justo Beramendi and Lourenzo Fernández Prieto: thank you for your kindness and for guiding me in Galicia. Your interest in my research has instilled me with a confidence that I lacked before meeting each of you. To my beloved undergraduate professors at Rhodes College: thank you for encouraging me to be evermore curious. To Victor Coonin: thank you for a simple conversation that gave me courage when I needed it most. To my family and friends: for supporting and loving me unconditionally. To Marcos: for your cover illustration, enthusiasm and help with the interviews. Finally, to Alex: for your patience and your compassion, for reading all of my work, I truly cannot thank you enough.

La visualización dunha nación: Tàpies e Cataluña

Resumo

O día 23 de marzo de 1981 Jordi Pujol deu un discurso en relación coa exposición *Cataluña Avui*, na se da UNESCO en París. O presidente da Generalitat de Cataluña, expresaba con orgullo a riqueza artística de Cataluña, facía acordar á audiencia que cando escoitan falar de Antoni Tàpies, Miró, Dalí, e incluso Picasso, deberan acordar a súa identidade catalana. Pujol presentou estes artistas coma líderes dunha poboación histórica, industrializada e culta. O seu obxectivo era promover os logros dun pobo que compón parte do estado español recién democratizado. Para Pujol, durante os anos 80, Tàpies xa deixara a súa impronta coma unha figura importante dentro do *poble catalá*. Por que o arte de Tàpies convertérase nun icono en Cataluña? En 2014, dous días despois dunha votación no-oficial sobre a soberanía de Cataluña, Artur Mas, o presidente da Generalitat falara sobre o referendun en Barcelona; durante este discurso foi fotografiado sentado na Dala Tarradellas do Palau da Generalitat cun cadro enorme de Tàpies, *Les quatre cròniques* (1990) mostrado no fondo. Que papel tiña a Generalitat na promoción da obra do artista? Como pode o contexto afetar á recepción das obras de arte de Tàpies? Nun clima político radicalmente diferente de cando se creou esta pintura, a imaxe adquire un novo significado.

Palabras clave: Tàpies, Arte, Cataluña, Política, Nacionalismo.



La visualización de una nación: Tàpies y Cataluña

Resumen

El 23 de marzo de 1981 Jordi Pujol dio un discurso en relación con la exposición *Cataluña Avui*, en la sede de la UNESCO en París. El presidente de la Generalitat de Catalunya, expresaba con orgullo la riqueza artística de Cataluña, recordaba a la audiencia que cuando oyen hablar de Antoni Tàpies, Miró, Dalí, e incluso Picasso, deberían recordar su identidad catalana. Pujol presentó a estos artistas como los líderes de una población histórica, industrializado, y culta. Su objetivo era promover los logros de un pueblo que compone parte del estado español recién democratizado. Para Pujol, durante los años 80, Tàpies ya había dejado su impronta como una figura importante dentro del *poble Català*. ¿Por qué el arte de Tàpies se ha convertido en un icono en Cataluña? En 2014, dos días después de una votación no oficial sobre la soberanía de Cataluña, Artur Mas, el presidente de la Generalitat ha hablado sobre este referendun en Barcelona; durante este discurso fue fotografiado sentado en la Sala Tarradellas del Palau de la Generalitat con un cuadro enorme de Tàpies, *Les quatre Cròniques* (1990) que se adivina en el fondo. ¿Qué papel tenía la Generalitat en la promoción de la obra del artista? ¿Cómo puede el contexto afectar a la recepción de las obras de arte de Tàpies? En un clima político radicalmente diferente de cuando se creó esta pintura, esta imagen adquiere un nuevo significado.

Palabras clave: Tàpies, Arte, Cataluña, Política, Nacionalismo

The Visualization of a Nation: Tàpies and Catalonia

Abstract

On March 23, 1981 Jordi Pujol gave a speech regarding the exhibition *Catalunya Avui*. The President of the Generalitat proudly expressed the artistic wealth of Catalonia, reminding the audience that when they hear of Tàpies, Miró, Dalí, and even Picasso they ought to remember their Catalan heritage. For Pujol in the 1980s, Tàpies had already made his mark as an important figure within *el poble Català*. In 2014, after a referendum regarding Catalan independence, Artur Mas spoke to the press about the event. He was photographed in a room with Tàpies's enormous painting *Les quatre cròniques* (1990) looming in the background. In a political climate dramatically different from when the painting was created, the image took on new meanings. This investigation analyzes Tàpies's style, the institutional support that he received, the historical context of his artistic exhibitions, and the bilateral relationship between politics and art.

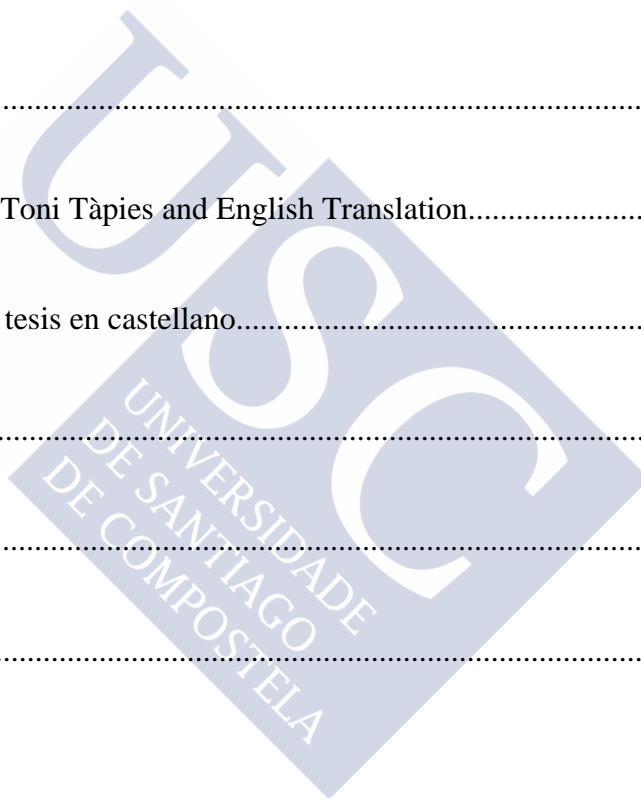
Keywords: Tàpies, Art, Catalonia, Politics, Nationalism



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1 Introduction

“We should never forget that imagination has been central to agency for most of human history.”

Umut Ozkirimli¹

In 1981 the President of the Catalan Government Jordi Pujol expressed his esteem for the artistic activity of Catalonia. He simultaneously praised the Romanesque and modern artists of the region, specifying naming Antoni Gaudí, Joan Miró, Antoni Tàpies, and Salvador Dalí. Pujol idolized this group of men to demonstrate that Catalonia harbors creativity and innovation. The president went on to discuss how the exhibition *Catalunya Avui*, held at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, would expose Catalan culture to the international audience and enable a better understanding of Spain as well.² Reviewing the list of Pujol’s acclaimed artists, Tàpies must be the least famous. It is impossible to visit Barcelona without gawking at one of Gaudí’s eccentric buildings. His unfinished basilica Sagrada Família is the most visited monument in all of Spain. Similarly, Miró’s style with cheerful colors and fantastical figures makes his art instantly recognizable. An established name in the ‘Western’ canon of art history, Miró’s individuality separated him from contemporary circles of artists working to cultivate Surrealism and Dada, however he developed his style parallel to avant-garde movements in interwar Paris. Dalí is internationally known as an artist with a dramatic personality. His paintings with melting clocks are perhaps as equally renowned as his ostentatious moustache. Tàpies’s artistic merit is recognized within the art world and his reputation has maintained closely tied to that community. His dirty, demanding, ambiguous pictures are not easily read. They are neither jovial like Miró’s work nor scandalous like Dalí’s. During the mid twentieth century, however, Tàpies developed a unique language that Catalans continue to celebrate today.

¹ Umut Ozkirimli, *Contemporary Debates On Nationalism: A Critical Engagement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 205.

² Jordi Pujol, Discurso en la sede la UNESCO en París, con motivo de la exposición *Catalunya Avui* (March 23, 1981), 115-117.

1.1 Goals

Why has Tàpies's art become iconic in Catalonia? In 2009, art historian Katherine Jentleson referred to him as the “reigning cultural king of post-Picasso Spain.”³ Looking back with the perspective of an art historian, it is logical to position Tàpies amongst modern masters such as Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Kazimir Malevich, Jackson Pollock, Robert Rauschenberg, and Willem de Kooning. However, what is it that has made his somber, grimy images beloved in Barcelona? In 1981, as Pujol proclaimed, Tàpies was an honorable figure in the Catalan community. On the day of the artist's death on February 6, 2012 the President of the Generalitat de Catalunya Artur Mas asserted, “Tàpies was the artist with the most radically Catalan thoughts, expressions, and references.”⁴ This study will explore the sociopolitical conditions that enabled Tàpies to effectively replace Miró as the principle reference of visual art in Catalonia.

What were the sociopolitical circumstances that affected the artist's ascent to prominence? While specifically investigating the role that the Generalitat de Catalunya and the Ajuntament de Barcelona played in promoting the artist's work, we can better understand how local institutions chose to support Tàpies, in addition to why they chose to do so. Different organizations have demonstrated dissimilar incentives through their relationships with the artist and his work. For example, the Generalitat appropriated Tàpies in the 1980s and 1990s and fit his work into a Catalan nationalist narrative, while the Ajuntament sought to portray his art as representative of Barcelona's modernity. Other establishments have highlighted Tàpies's Spanish heritage, while literature and media concerning the artist's national identity is variable.

Recent retrospective exhibitions, organized in the twenty-first century, have provoked further questions concerning the perception of Tàpies's art. How does context affect the reception of his artworks? I am particularly concerned with the way that the public could view the artist's aesthetic as conveying certain ideologies without consideration of the history of the maker's life and previous works. This study will examine how exhibitions at the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (MNAC), Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Instituto Cervantes, and Dia:Beacon have presented the artist and how particular cultural institutions can

³ Katherine Jentleson, “Antoni Tàpies: An Artist's Odyssey in the Age of Franco,” *Artinfo*, July 2, 2009.

⁴ “Artur Mas: ‘Tàpies ha sido el artista más radicalmente catalán en su pensamiento, su expresión y sus referentes,’” *El Periódico*, February 6, 2012, accessed January 10, 2016, <http://www.elperiodico.com/es/noticias/ocio-y-cultura/artur-mas-sido-artista-mas-radicalmente-catalan-pensamiento-expresion-sus-referentes-1393521>.

All translations from Catalan or Spanish texts are my own unless otherwise noted.

mold the conception of contemporary Catalan identities. In looking at the way in which works of art are presented to the public, I intend to draw attention to often-unforeseen nuances concerning institutional agendas and the practice of creating exhibitions.

For example, curators do more than simply select artworks that fit into a particular theme; they structure the order and environment in which we experience those works, similar to a pastor who herds a flock of sheep. In turn, this affects our thoughts and sensations concerning the works themselves. I will illustrate this point through the comparison of exhibitions held in Barcelona, Bilbao, and New York in order to demonstrate the extent to which curators can control the perceived meaning of artistic content.

How does political art impact national thought? Murray Edelman's book *From Art to Politics: How Artistic Creations Shape Political Conceptions* demonstrated that art is able to "excite minds and feelings" differently than other quotidian experiences.⁵ Furthermore, art can create new realities, offering alternative perspectives that could lead to previously unperceived possibilities. Through the presentation of visual ideas, art can activate critical thinking, "energize" democracy, and encourage a rethinking of conventional habits and beliefs.⁶ Edelman showed that art is a fundamental aspect of the human experience and it is always political.

While *From Art to Politics* established that art is a significant political force, it did not delve into the relationship between art and nationalism. What is the current relationship between the artwork of Tàpies, nationalisms, and national identities in Catalonia? While Tàpies created many canvases that show his desire to visually express material associated with his homeland, they do not reveal to us that being Catalan is mutually exclusive with being Spanish or even European. This is critical to recognize when observing his art decades after its creation. At the same time, Tàpies's acceptance of certain public projects and, more interestingly, his refusal to create a mural for Madrid's international airport in the early 1990s did reveal the artist's attitude towards high-profile works beyond Catalonia. Through his art and writing, what Tàpies did make clear was his desire for freedom and a democratic government both in any beyond Catalonia. This investigation seeks to consider both the artist's depictions in relation to nationalism and the way that diverse groups from different parts of the globe can come to understand his art in various spaces and times.

⁵ Murray Edelman, *From Art to Politics: How Artistic Creations Shape Political Conceptions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 143.

⁶ Edelman, *From Art to Politics*, 144.

1.2 Historiography

Montserrat Guibernau stated that the Catalan artists Miró, Gaudí, Dalí, Tàpies, and Casals have been converted into icons that play a role in the emotional arguments linked to Catalan nationalism.⁷ At different moments throughout history, Catalan nationalists have looked to art and culture in order to support the idea that Catalonia is different from Spain. In *Identitats contemporànies: Catalunya i Espanya*, Borja de Riquer stressed that being Catalan stems from one's identity and is related to the land's "history, customs, traditions, laws, art, and, essentially, language and culture."⁸ However, that difference is not necessarily problematic. During the debates concerning the drafting of Spain's 1978 Constitution, all of Catalonia's political parties except for the Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) accepted the configuration of Catalonia as one of Spain's multiple nationalities. ERC's representative Heribert Barrera objected to characterizing Spain itself as a nation, but his party did not have an issue with Catalonia's political inclusion within the Kingdom of Spain. He stated that Catalonia's future status as an Autonomous Community "is perfectly compatible with our feelings and aspirations as Catalans."⁹

Literature concerning the nature of Catalan nationalism is extensive and often emphasizes Catalonia's unique situation as a stateless nation within a multinational state, the historicity of Catalan Courts, and the movement's propensity towards nonviolent mobilization (Balcells, Balfour and Quiroga, Conversi, Cramerí, Dowling, Guibernau, Mar-Molinero and Smith, McRoberts, Molinero and Ysàs, Sobrer, and Riquer).¹⁰ However, as both Guibernau and Riquer's quotations have communicated, emotions and feelings are also important factors that

⁷ Montserrat Guibernau, "Nationalism and Intellectuals in Nations without States: the Catalan Case," *Working Papers* 222 (Barcelona: Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials, 2003), 25.

⁸ Borja de Riquer, *Identitats contemporànies: Catalunya i Espanya* (Vic: Eumo, 2000), 219.

⁹ Carme Molinero and Pere Ysàs, *La cuestión catalana: Cataluña en la transición española* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2014), 239.

¹⁰ Albert Balcells, *Catalan Nationalism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996); Sebastian Balfour and Alejandro Quiroga, *The Reinvention of Spain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Daniel Conversi, *The Basques, the Catalans and Spain: Alternative Routes to Nationalist Mobilisation* (Reno & Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 1997); Kathryn Cramerí, *Goodbye Spain?: The Question of Independence for Catalonia* (East Sussex, England: Sussex Academic Press, 2014); Andrew Dowling, *Catalonia since the Spanish Civil War: reconstructing the nation* (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2013); Montserrat Guibernau, *Catalan Nationalism: Francoism, Transition and Democracy* (London: Routledge, 2004); Clare Mar-Molinero and Angel Smith, (eds.), *Nationalism and the nation in the Iberian Peninsula: Competing and Conflicting Identities* (Oxford: Berg, 1996); Kenneth McRoberts, *Catalonia: Nation Building Without a State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Molinero and Ysàs, *La cuestión catalana*; Josep Miquel Sobrer, *Catalonia: a Self-Portrait* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); and Riquer, *Identitats contemporànies*.

have an impact on nationalism and national identity through a process that Alejandro Quiroga explained as the personalization of the nation, the link between nationalism and national identity.¹¹ Anthony D. Smith shares this perspective, understanding emotions as a sort of primer for nationalism and, through extension, the nonverbal side of national “fabrication/ invention/ [and] manipulation.”¹² This investigation does not pretend to analyze the different forms or shifting nature of twentieth and twenty-first century Catalan nationalism. Instead, it seeks to identify how the work of Tàpies is, and has been, attached to the idea of Catalonia.

Few art historians have examined the relation between the nation and modern art in Spain. Robert Lubar conceptualized Miró’s artistic career as moving from a cataloging of Catalan country life to an exploration of the act of painting and how minimal his subjects could become before they would lose their ideological weight.¹³ Lubar expressed Miró’s vacillation between the antiquated and the modern as the artist’s “desire to come to terms with traditional Catalan values and international (European) artistic impulses.”¹⁴ Miró’s early works show a longing for an appropriate visual language to communicate a contemporary Catalan “essence.”¹⁵ Robin Greeley reversed Lubar’s terms, claiming that Miró’s early use of representation to create a modern cultural identity was inverted in the artist’s work after 1923; Catalan identity became the subject and the act of representation turned into the agent.¹⁶

Miró sought to construct a visual notion of what it means to be Catalan. However, Lubar reminded us that the artist’s first solo exhibition at Galeries Dalmau in Barcelona was a failure. The public ridiculed and criticized the works of art, which catalyzed Miró’s move to Paris

¹¹ Alejandro Quiroga, “The Three Spheres. A theoretical model of mass nationalization: the case of Spain,” *Nations and Nationalism* 20:4 (2014), 693.

¹² Ludger Mees, “Emociones en política. Conceptos, debates y perspectivas analíticas,” *Emoción e identidad nacional: Cataluña y el País Vasco en perspectiva comparada*, Géraldine Galeote, Maria Llobart Huesca, and Maitane Ostolaza (eds.), (Paris: Éditions Hispaniques, 2015): 25-45, 40. See: Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples. Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹³ Robert Lubar, “Joan Miró before ‘The Farm,’ 1915-1922: Catalan Nationalism and the Avant-garde” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1988) and “Miró’s Linguistic Nationalism” *Cent Anys de Miró, Mompou i Foix* (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 1994).

¹⁴ Lubar, “Joan Miró before ‘The Farm’ ...,” xvii.

¹⁵ Rosalind Krauss and Margit Rowell, *Joan Miró: The Magnetic Fields* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1972), 84.

¹⁶ Robin Greeley, “Nationalism, Civil War and Painting: Joan Miró and Catalanisme in the 1930’s” (Paper presented at the University of Michigan, 1996), 76. Greeley also analyzes both Spanish and Mexican nationalism with her examination of surrealist paintings during the civil war in Spain and Maria Izquierdo’s paintings that affectively provided an alternative to the popular “big three” muralists in post-revolutionary Mexico. See: *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) and “Painting Mexican Identities: Nationalism and Gender in the work of María Izquierdo,” *Oxford Art Journal* (2000).

shortly after.¹⁷ Barcelona's art patrons proved to be too conservative for the young artist during the first years of his professional career. In 1948, two years before Tàpies's first solo exhibition at Galeries Laietanes in Barcelona, the two artists met for the first time.¹⁸ This encounter brought together two men, of different generations, with similar goals. Both sought to push modern painting to its limits without losing sight of their Catalan identities. The former Director of the Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Manuel Borja-Villel, explained that Tàpies had direct access to a number of Miró's works through the collection of Joan Prats. Furthermore, Tàpies greatly admired Miró's ability to manipulate the materials with which he worked. For Tàpies, Miró's art was both powerful and convincing, an embodiment of both modernity and the avant-garde.¹⁹

Scholarship concerning Tàpies is limited. American authors often discuss the formal aspects of his art and regard him as a European artist working within Informalism, an artistic movement that developed in the 1940s around the same time as Abstract Expressionism (Lubar, Mayhew, and Fishman).²⁰ Little work has been done that analyzes the social role of Tàpies's work and his foundation in Barcelona. In 1995 Lubar expressed the need for more dedication to Tàpies after what he deemed was a mediocre retrospective exhibition in New York. In a review of the show, the art historian discussed the role that the Catalan artist played in shaping two generations of artists. Through his creation of a unique style and his experimentation with non-traditional media, Tàpies served as a model for younger international artists looking to break away from Surrealism and later Abstract Expressionism. As Lubar pointed out at the end of the review in a frank and disappointed tone, "Antoni Tàpies deserves far more."²¹

While there are countless exhibition essays about Tàpies's works, critical examinations of his creations and their importance (both plastic and social) are far from developed. A couple of the more developed exhibition texts include Lluís Permanyer's from the 1986 *Tàpies y la nueva cultura* and Laurence Rassel's from the 2013 *Tàpies From Within*.²² These presentations

¹⁷ Lubar, "Joan Miró before 'The Farm,' 1915-1922: Catalan Nationalism and the Avant-garde," 116.

¹⁸ Barbara Catoir, *Conversations with Antoni Tàpies* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1991), 24.

¹⁹ Manuel Borja-Villel, "Antoni Tàpies: Pintura matèrica y surrealismo," *Kalías 2* (October 1989: 82-95), 83-85.

²⁰ Robert Lubar "Antoni Tàpies Recent Works," (New York: Pace Gallery, 1993) and "Tàpies. New York," *The Burlington Magazine* 137;1105 (1995); Jonathan Mayhew "Valente/Tàpies: The Poetics of Materiality" *Anales de la literatura española contemporánea* 22;1/1 (1997); George Fishman, "Antoni Tàpies elevates consciousness and conscience in PAMM exhibit," *Miami Herald*, March 13, 2015, accessed March 23, 2015, <http://www.miamiherald.com/entertainment/visual-arts/article14061947.html>.

²¹ Lubar, "Tàpies. New York," 273.

²² Lluís Permanyer, *Tàpies y la nueva cultura* (Barcelona: Polígrafa, 1986); Laurence Rassel, *Tàpies From Within 1945-2011* (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 2013).

introduced particular works of each exhibition to the general public. Both are accurate accounts, yet not particularly reflective.

Similarly, many articles published in numerous periodicals have followed Tàpies's long career, however they only scratch the surface of the political implications associated with his works of art. While contemporary newspaper articles have not generally addressed this particular topic that I am concerned with, they have provided much insight on the different ways in which the artist was conjured and represented, in order to bolster underlying and even invented arguments that have to do with Catalonia and Spain. For example, *ABC* detailed Tàpies's 1990 Premio Príncipe de Asturias award using a quotation from an artist and member of the jury Javier Mariscal. The newspaper printed Mariscal's statement that Tàpies "has always made works that are very European, and, above all, very Spanish,"²³ without any sort of clarification to what exactly "very European" or "very Spanish" artwork actually means. Mariscal also stated that it is impossible to understand the artwork of Miquel Barceló without comprehending Tàpies. While there are countless examples of the proud projection of Tàpies as Spanish or Catalan and sometimes both, little work has been done to investigate how the artist's works of art have been presented in Spain and abroad. Later, I will discuss in greater detail how different sources in the media have interpreted Tàpies's identity.

Director of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (Reina Sofía) Manuel Borja-Villel's 1989 doctoral thesis is the most outstanding study concerning Tàpies and the formal characteristics of his works of art. The unpublished work discussed the Matter Paintings in depth and includes a comprehensive catalogue of exhibitions, publications, and an interview with the artist.²⁴ Matter painting was a term coined in the 1950s to describe a technique of combining alternative materials (such as sand, mud, marble dust etc.) with a thin layer of paint in order to achieve a desired texture.²⁵ Borja-Villel was the first to approach these paintings from an academic perspective. In the same year, he also published an article in *Kalías* that examined the relationship between Tàpies and Surrealism. *Kalías* was a biannual magazine edited by the Generalitat de Valencia and the Institut Valencià d'Art Modern that ran from 1989 to 2002. The

²³ "Antoni Tàpies galardonado con el Príncipe de Asturias de las Artes por su 'riesgo creativo y capacidad innovadora,'" *ABC* (Sevilla), May 19, 1990, 61, accessed June 13, 2016, <http://hemeroteca.abc.es/nav/Navigate.exe/hemeroteca/sevilla/abc.sevilla/1990/05/19/061.html>.

²⁴ Manuel Borja-Villel, "Antoni Tàpies: The 'Matter Paintings'" (Doctoral Thesis, City University of New York, 1989). There is a version of the unpublished text in the Fundació Antoni Tàpies Library.

²⁵ "Matter Painting," Tate, accessed May 17, 2015, <http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary/m/matter-painting>.

magazine printed scholarship on art theory, analysis, and criticism. In the second edition, Borja-Villel argued that Tàpies's affinity with Miró's work did not terminate with the end of his surrealist compositions in the 1950s and he discussed how the Matter Paintings purposefully play with the push and pull between the foreground and the background.²⁶ This is something that Miró also did, which effectively creates a confusion of conceivable space.

Borja-Villel has not published a tremendous quantity of work concerning Tàpies, however, his writings are the most thoughtful. As he stated in 2009 in an article published in *El País*, Tàpies "is not a Spanish invention, but an artist whose work is fundamental in order to understand other works of art created during the second half of the twentieth century."²⁷ Still, Borja-Villel's examinations stayed close to the works of art and within the conventional boundaries of art history. He has not delved into the social and political ramifications of the work as this study does. Furthermore, although he did discuss Tàpies's recycling of Miró's use of letters and signs in the *Kalías* article, he missed one of the most significant iconographic connections, the cross, which I will elaborate on in the following chapter.

Polígrafa has published the great deal of books concerning Tàpies, far outnumbering any other publisher, for example: Alexandre Cirici's *Tàpies: Testimoni del silenci*, José Corredor-Matheos's *Antoni Tàpies: materia, signo, espíritu*, and Andreas Franzke's *Tàpies*.²⁸ The Barcelona-based company that was founded in 1964 has contributed to Tàpies's exposure in and beyond Catalonia through texts written in Catalan, Spanish, and English. Polígrafa also published (together with Fundació Antoni Tàpies) eight volumes of the artist's complete works, available in Catalan, Spanish, English, and French. Many of Polígrafa's publications have addressed Tàpies's connection to Catalonia, especially Pere Gimferrer's 1975 *Tàpies and the Catalan Spirit*. However, more than four decades have passed since the poet from Barcelona wrote this book and this investigation provides an updated, more nuanced, and less partial perspective on the artist's relationship to Catalonia.

European publications have tended to point out the artist's Catalan heritage, biographical history, ethical values, and artistic inspiration (Borja-Villel, Cator, Cirici, Corredor-Matheos, Dupin, Agustí, Enguita Mayo, Miquel Tàpies, Franzke, Gasch, Gimferrer, Penrose, Permanyer,

²⁶ Borja-Villel, "Antoni Tàpies: Pintura matérica y surrealismo," 84; 91-92.

²⁷ Barbara Ceus, "Tàpies, más allá de la pintura," *El País*, May 18, 2009.

²⁸ Alexandre Cirici, *Tàpies: Testimoni del silenci* (Barcelona: Polígrafa, 1974); José Corredor-Matheos, *Antoni Tàpies: materia, signo, espíritu* (Barcelona: Polígrafa, 1992); Andreas Franzke, *Tàpies* (Barcelona: Polígrafa, 1992).

Rassel, and Tapié).²⁹ Few investigations have analyzed the political implications of Tàpies's art. Barbara Catoir questioned the artist about his personal beliefs in her 1991 *Conversations with Antoni Tàpies* and his responses were almost as ambivalent as his canvases. In addition to examinations of the formal aspects of the artist's works and his artistic career, newspaper articles featuring Tàpies were bountiful, particularly in the early 1990s. While Tàpies himself also wrote extensively about his work, he ultimately said quite little about how to read his pictures.³⁰ His difficult style and purposeful ambiguity make it challenging to pin down any objective meaning, which is one of the reasons that more scholastic attention should be dedicated to the artist and how his artworks are presented to the public.

In *Tàpies and the Catalan Spirit* Gimferrer boldly announced "the work of Antoni Tàpies is now at a beginning of a future that belongs to it."³¹ With this statement, the poet demonstrated his regard for Tàpies's work and confidence in his artistic career. Similar to the belated public recognition of works by Gaudí, Miró and the Catalan poet J.V. Foix, Gimferrer predicted in 1975 that Tàpies's work was at the beginning of a similar path.³² Furthermore, he established a parallel relation that linked Miró and Foix with Tàpies and Joan Brossa as two different generations of avant-garde artists and poets that best represented what he called the "Catalan spirit."³³ Gimferrer, despite his romantic ideas about the essence of Catalonia, accurately pointed out that Tàpies's work ought to be considered using a bilateral perspective in relation to the regional culture; it is important to consider how Catalan culture shaped Tàpies's art *and* how Tàpies's art instates itself in the trajectory of that culture.³⁴ Gimferrer's analysis is now dated, as he wrote the text under Francoism. After nearly 40 years of democracy in Spain, an updated evaluation of the artist's relationship to culture in Catalonia will shed light on the evolving nature of this relation. Recent nationalist activity, including a popular separatist movement, in the region further

²⁹ Manuel Borja-Villel, "Antoni Tàpies: The 'Matter Paintings'" and *Fundació Antoni Tàpies* (Barcelona: Edicions de l'Eixample, 1990); Catoir, *Conversations with Antoni Tàpies*; Alexandre Cirici, *Tàpies: Testimoni del silenci*; José Corredor-Matheos, *Antoni Tàpies: materia, signo*; Jacques Dupin, *Matiere d'infini* (Tours: Farrago, 2005); Anna Agustí, Nuria Enguita Mayo and Miquel Tàpies, *Tàpies. Obra completa. Volum 8è. 1998-2004* (Barcelona: Polígrafa and Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 2006); Andreas Franzke, *Tàpies*; Sebastian Gasch, *Tàpies* (Madrid: Dirección General de Bellas Artes, 1971); Pere Gimferrer, *Tàpies and the Catalan Spirit* (Barcelona: Polígrafa, 1975); Roland Penrose, *Tàpies* (Barcelona: Polígrafa, 1977); Permanyer, *Tàpies y la nueva cultura*; Rassel, *Tàpies From Within 1945-2011*; Michel Tapié, *Antoni Tàpies* (Milan: Fratelli Fabbri, 1969).

³⁰ Catoir, *Conversations with Antoni Tàpies*.

³¹ Gimferrer, *Tàpies and the Catalan Spirit*, 82.

³² *Ibid.*, 81.

³³ *Ibid.*, 36.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

complicates the exhibition politics surrounding Tàpies's works. New assessments of his compositions are necessary as Spain enters a new era of history. Although the artist passed away in 2012, his visual language has been very much alive in Barcelona in the years following his death. This investigation provides a fresh perspective on Tàpies and the relationship between visual art and national politics.

1.3 Hypotheses

This investigation opens a new debate concerning the political role of art in society. Using Tàpies and Catalonia as a case study, I propose several hypotheses. First, the artist's work became iconic for a population at a unique moment in time, ironically enabling the artist to prosper during the 1970s. The beginning of Tàpies's career coincided with an era of political repression in Spain and a time when abstraction was internationally recognized as a valuable vehicle for political expression within the art world. This moment was critical in the early formation of the artist and his style; it allowed him to create politically charged, semi-abstract art in the 1950s and 1960s that would become respected around the globe without drawing too much attention from General Francisco Franco's regime. Beginning with his Matter Paintings, Tàpies used art as a means of political communication.

His objectives were not always clear, but as a whole he sought to defend democracy, justice, and freedom through his works of art. Unlike Picasso or Miró, Tàpies lived in Spain during and after the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). The style that Tàpies developed in post-war Spain allowed him to continue living there because his ideas were not necessarily explicitly expressed in visual terms. Picasso, on the other hand, denounced Francisco Franco and his conservative ideology in his grotesque 1937 etchings titled *Sueño y mentira de Franco*; Picasso was living in France when he made these compositions and he never returned to Spain again. Although Tàpies experienced the war as a young boy, he remained in Catalonia afterwards. The conditions in which he developed his artistic style did not allow him to be as bold as Picasso had been in 1937. Tàpies had to be careful; he astutely avoided concrete political imagery during the 1950s and 1960s while simultaneously developing an inventive body of work that was relevant in an international panorama of visual arts. Tàpies continued to work in the same style

throughout the remainder of his artistic career, producing an impressive body of thousands of artworks that have maintained a tremendous stylistic continuity.

Second, the Generalitat de Catalunya and the Ajuntament de Barcelona played a major role in promoting the artist within the region and sought to present Tàpies as a model Catalan citizen both during and after his lifetime. However, each group did so in their own way. While both bodies championed Tàpies as one of the most reputable living artist in Spain during the 1980s, their reasons for taking interest in the artwork was disparate. Jordi Pujol and his conservative coalition *Convergència i Unió* (CiU) ran the Generalitat from 1980 to 2003. CiU's nationalist program worked in harmony with the commission and financial support that the Generalitat offered Tàpies during this period. Tàpies's relationship with the regional government was mutually beneficial despite the artist's leftist political views. The Generalitat was happy to promote the internationally acclaimed artist who articulated his Catalan heritage and the artist embraced the institution's initiatives to expose his work. The Ajuntament, on the other hand, was controlled by a socialist party, *Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya* (PSC), which promoted Tàpies as a contemporary, vanguard artist with an international profile and encouraged him via financial aid, public commissions, and exhibition publications. The local government was eager to project Barcelona's modernity, especially in the years leading up to the 1992 Olympic Games held in the *Ciudad Condal*. Tàpies and his foundation played a role in the transformation of the city in the years prior to the event. For the Ajuntament de Barcelona, Tàpies's value did not necessarily lie in his Catalan roots, instead he was espoused for his artistic ingenuity, developed during a time when many of Spain's talented artists and intellectuals remained abroad as a result of the war and ensuing dictatorship.

The institutional support that Tàpies received is remarkable. This is most evident through his public works and posthumous exhibitions that have honored his life and artistic career. Investigating the connection between the artist and these major political bodies is imperative in order to visualize a top-down *and* bottom-up model of cultural analysis in Catalonia. Tàpies's career certainly benefited from the relationships that he built with local and regional governments in Spain. Interestingly, his discernable artistic style was created in response to a lack of a democratic system in Catalonia. The artwork itself ought to belong to a bottom-up conceptualization of culture, however its public exhibition and patronage were often tied to systems of power. The artist's continual representation of his particular style, coupled with an

analysis of the nature of institutional support that Tàpies received, amplifies more traditional studies primarily concerning the formal characteristics of his works.

Third, contemporary shows that have included Tàpies's work are subject to misinterpretation of the artist's ideologies, specifically the representation of art that may concern Catalonia's relationship to Spain. A greater understanding of the artist's life and work is needed in order to preserve the artwork's integrity and to avoid misconceptions in addition to generalizations. The exhibition practices of cultural institutions like MNAC are always political and play an active role in the conception and negotiation of Catalan identity from within and from the outside. Learning at this museum is not limited to visitors living in the region. This institution has also sought to present ideas about art and society to 'foreign' visitors from other parts of Spain, Europe, and beyond. While there does not seem to be a model that could eliminate political sway from public exhibitions, being aware of the underlying structures of power that envelop cultural institutions is an important part of viewing works of art.

Finally, political art is an often-overlooked avenue that channels ideas about historical and contemporary identity. National identity is amongst one of the most powerful (albeit frequently veiled) themes in Tàpies's artwork. It is a theme that continues to resonate with some Catalan citizens that have been seeking new ways to govern themselves during the past decade. In examining the ways in which art can trigger emotional and intellectual responses, a heightened awareness of our own responses to outside stimuli becomes evident. Emotions can be the "motor behind individual and collective conduct", despite the difficulties that historians may face in their definition and analysis.³⁵ Furthermore, an analysis of the way in which objects that often trigger emotions are presented also exposes the political power structures that frequently affect how beholders experience works of art.

The scale of a work of art does not have to correlate with its degree of engagement with political affairs. It is true that large artworks that take up political themes do so in a grandiose manner; for example, Picasso's *Guernica* or works by the 'big three' Mexican muralists Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros. However, size does not determine the quality of engagement with societal concerns that an artwork is able to transmit. Different formats are able to convey various viewpoints. For example, the form of Goya's series of etchings *The Disasters of War* has little in common with any large-scale painting. They are small,

³⁵ Mees, "Emociones en política. Conceptos, debates y perspectivas analíticas," 37.

detailed, horrific scenes meant for close observation. Physically holding the images close enough to be able to see their detail is part of the experience. *Guernica*, on the other hand, was created for viewers to pass from the right to the left, as it was made specifically for the 1937 International Exposition in Paris where visitors would enter from one side and exit on the other. Reading a Goya etching and a Picasso painting provides entirely different sensations, although both take up themes of war, violence, and brutality.

Many of Tàpies's public works are quite large. However, some of his most potent political works, such as his 2006 cover for the *Estatut d'Autonomia de Catalunya*, are small. This is significant because as a viewer, individuals are more likely to identify with smaller formats. Viewers tend to feel less like an isolated observer when the work of art has a scale that is approachable. Through an analysis of the formal characteristics, ideological subject matter, and forms of exhibition, this study expounds how Tàpies's art is involved in the formation and reformation of national identity and nationalism in Catalonia.

Becoming attuned to the ways in which context affects our perception, conceptualization, and understanding of works of art is imperative in order to think critically about visual languages. The situation of art in particular circumstances can alter our thoughts and imagination. While it is impossible to escape the temporal moment of our own existence, it is necessary to consider how time conditions our perceptions of reality. In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Jacques Rancière used Victor Hugo's 1862 *Les Misérables* as an example of a narrative that, depending on the reader and how history conditioned their historical moment, has had numerous different interpretations.³⁶ Changing political circumstances affect the way we come to conceptualize works of art, literature included. Rancière outlined the "problem" that exists between aesthetics and politics, "...there is no criterion for establishing an appropriate correlation between the politics of aesthetics and the aesthetics of politics."³⁷ Although there is no specific formula to determine how these two concepts are interconnected, their relationship is bilateral. Politics affects aesthetics (and art) and vice versa.

³⁶ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 62.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 62.

1.4 Methodology

In “Art, Nationalism and War: Political Futurism in Italy (1909-1944)” Daniele Conversi examined the relationship between the Italian Futurist movement, fascism, and nation-building and inventing.³⁸ This study can be taken as a model of an interdisciplinary approach to achieve a better understanding of the links between art and politics during the twentieth century. The futurists of Italy created their own short-lived political party *Partito Politico Futurista* (1918-1920), which was later absorbed into the *Partito Nazionale Fascista*. Conversi showed that “the futurists were involved and partook actively in Fascism’s most violent exploits” and that the movement was part of a “broader European phenomenon of the ‘nationalization of the masses.’”³⁹ The study relied more on Futurism’s written material and the various forms of media transmission, as opposed to focusing on plastic works of art. Conversi stated that the subject has been exhausted in the context of art historical accounts, characterizing the discipline as having a “selective propensity to eulogistic accounts,” yet its political ramifications had not yet been adequately addressed.⁴⁰

Without accusing Tàpies scholars of being “eulogistic,” a similar lack of critical inquiry with respect to the political nature of the artist’s work is plain. Although Tàpies himself recognized that “painting during the Franco regime was less difficult than painting in Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy because they [Francisco Franco and entourage] thought that modern art was not important and that it did not actually influence daily life,”⁴¹ his work is comparable to that of the futurists. While these Italian artists collaborated with Mussolini and his totalitarian regime, Tàpies sought to undermine Francisco Franco’s dictatorship, yet both the futurists and Tàpies created a visual language that formed ideological borders concerning the idea of the nation and its reputation.

Another exemplary study concerning the relation between art and politics is David McCarthy’s 2015 book *American Artists against War (1935-2010)*.⁴² The first chapter outlines

³⁸ Daniele Conversi, “Art, Nationalism and War: Political Futurism in Italy (1909-1944)” *Sociology Compass* 3/1 (2009): 92-117.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 106; 93-94.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁴¹ Jentleson, “Antoni Tàpies....”

⁴² David McCarthy, *American Artists against War (1935-2010)* (Oakland: University of California Press Books, 2015).

how independent artists and the American Artists' Congress found ways to protest "fascism, militarism, and war" via works of art.⁴³ McCarthy stated,

Their actions were predicated on the deeply held beliefs that art has a role to play in shaping public consciousness in progressive societies and that artists should link creativity with citizenship, to the mutual benefit of both. Art would gain by the broadening of its worldview beyond abstraction, experimentation, and hermetic symbolism. Citizenship might be improved by providing viewers with points of view that they may not have considered (or encountered), especially when the government and media have reason to shape the interpretation of events.⁴⁴

In other words, American antiwar artists did not necessarily halt any fascist regimes nor put an end to violence and war. However, they did provide a platform for the public to think. This is a valuable lesson because art and images are able to shape "public consciousness," for better or for worse⁴⁵. Consider, for example how twenty-first century advertisements are saturated with images and sprinkled with words. This is due to a picture's ability to emotionally impact the viewer's conscience quickly, instantaneously even. McCarthy based his argument in twentieth century art from the United States, but the crux of his analysis does not rely solely on that particular time and place; it depends heavily on the relationship between the formal characteristics of the work of art and the beholder's perception and response to visual stimuli.

Catalan politician Joan Guitart shared McCarthy's sentiment concerning art and politics. In the 1980s and 1990s, Guitart was a member of the political party *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya* (CDC) and he worked for the *Generalitat* as Councilor of Education and later Councilor of Culture. Between 1996 and 2004 he served as the President of MNAC's board of trustees. Similar to McCarthy, Guitart believed that art is directly linked to the welfare of citizens. In a discussion concerning the relationship between contemporary art and politics, Guitart told me "Culture, with a capital C, forms a fundamental part of the wellbeing of people and society, wellbeing understood as the best realization of countries and their citizens."⁴⁶ Both the art historian and the politician agreed that culture and citizenship are correlated and that connection is worth investigating.

⁴³ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁶ Interview with Joan Guitart, July 12, 2016.

In contrast to Conversi's analysis of Futurism's link to Fascism, McCarthy analyzed works of art that sought to defy ideologies in support of totalitarianism, violence, and imperialist wars. However, both studies have exemplified the political nature of art and its relevance beyond a frame of reference that restricts the history of art to its relation to other works of art. Rethinking Tàpies using the multidisciplinary scopes of Conversi and McCarthy, which encompass much more than the formal characteristics of works of art, is what distinguishes "The Visualization of a Nation: Tàpies and Catalonia" from previous analyses of the works of Antoni Tàpies.

Art, among the plethora of omnipresent images, signs, and symbols in contemporary culture, is able to selectively aggrandize national, historical narratives. Narratives concerning a nation, whether they deal with a heroic effort on behalf of an individual or a masterpiece created hundreds of years before the establishment of the nation state, can be perpetuated and preserved via images. Similarly, emblems associated with the modern nation are relentlessly propagated, marking particular spaces as linked to the power of the state. However, not all images are representative of historical truths, nor does demarcating a site with a flag or heraldic symbol create a space where only legal activities are carried out. Pictures, signs, and symbols all contribute to the myth of the modern nation as a historically legitimate entity, when in reality it is an invented concept commonly shared and accepted as just.

In *Narrating the Nation: Representations in History, Media and the Arts* Stefan Berger introduced the tremendous ways in which the fine arts have proposed and emphasized ideas concerning the modern nation.⁴⁷ Images, similar to other forms of creative expression, do not have to reflect reality. They can put forth new concepts of truth, whose meaning can change in both time and space. The relation between Tàpies's artwork and Catalan nationalism and identity is a central theme of this investigation.

To clarify, the term nationalism is not fixed and can connote different meanings depending on historical circumstances, geographies, etc. Individual identity is also an unfixed concept, susceptible to variation and modification. As Berger expressed in *Narrating the Nation*, "researchers seeking to understand the national conundrum from a variety of different perspectives are, themselves, not outside the discursive construction of the past but are

⁴⁷ Stefan Berger, Linas Eriksonas and Andrew Mycock, (eds.), *Narrating the Nation: Representations in History, Media and the Arts* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 9.

participating in the process.”⁴⁸ The very terms of this investigation are conditioned by the conventional ways in which contemporary societies are organized, as nations. While it is difficult to evade this fact, it is possible to be conscious that nations are constructed entities. They are neither divinely ordained nor everlasting.

For the purpose of this study, I rely on Benedict Anderson’s 1983 definition of the nation as “an imagined political community.”⁴⁹ In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Anderson defined the nation as “imagined” because the majority of its members will never come to meet the rest of their “fellow members” and the idea of community stems from what he characterized as a “deep, horizontal comradeship.”⁵⁰ This conception of the nation is closely linked to the people who feel that they somehow belong to that entity.⁵¹ This idea of belonging creates an us/them dynamic that, in the case of Catalonia, has different versions of ‘them’ depending on the historical moment and particular circumstance. ‘Them’ could be those who also live in Spain, but are not Catalan, or those who are not Spanish, or even both. In some instances, Catalan nationalism has not only about articulating what it means to be Catalan, but also what it means *not* to be Spanish.

E. J. Hobsbawm argued in his 1992 *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* that the nation and nationalism are dual phenomena in which nationalism is the reality that creates the myth, or imagined community, also known as the nation.⁵² In other words, nationalism is the motor that has propelled the vast spread of the idea of the nation as a legitimate political unit in a relatively short period of time. Hobsbawm relied on Ernest Gellner’s 1983 definition of nationalism as “primarily a principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent.”⁵³ In this sense, Catalonia is an exceptional case, where the nation belongs to another nation, despite a determined degree of legislative autonomy.

Michael Billig elaborated on the term nationalism in his 1995 book *Banal Nationalism*.⁵⁴ For Billig, nationalism needed to encompass more than temporary movements stemming from

⁴⁸ Berger et al., *Narrating the Nation*, 4.

⁴⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1983), 5-7.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁵¹ For alternative, contested definitions of nationalism see: Ozkirimli, *Contemporary Debates On Nationalism*, 15.

⁵² E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 9-10.

⁵³ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).

⁵⁴ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, (London: Sage, 1995), 6.

the periphery. Banal nationalism best describes how already established nations reproduce their “ideological habits.”⁵⁵ Billig stressed that banal is not synonymous with benign. Banal nationalism is ubiquitous in ‘Western’ nations, however one cannot say that it lacks a propensity towards violence. This idea, as I will later elaborate on in greater detail, has much to do with the signs and symbols that nations appropriate and accumulate in a way that makes their absence seem unimaginable. In terms of art and culture, Billig’s concepts help connect the often invisible links between the visual and political realm.

In *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*, Tim Edensor stated, “national identity is processed through the realms of affect and sensuality as much as through cognitive processes of meaning construction and transmission.”⁵⁶ Nationalism, the nation, and national identity are linked to an individual’s experiences and feelings. In “Emociones en política. Conceptos, debates y perspectivas analíticas,” Ludger Mees pointed out the difficulties that come with methods to analyze emotions and emotional experiences.⁵⁷ Despite this dilemma, historians have made advances in incorporating this important component into their investigations. This study also incorporates the intersections between emotions, national identity, and nationalism.

As Quiroga explained in “The Three Spheres. A theoretical model of mass nationalization: the case of Spain,” the individual is an “active subject who ‘personalizes the nation.’”⁵⁸ This personalization is what connects the concept of nationalism to that of national identity; it is contingent upon “attitudes” towards the nation and feelings of belonging to it. While experiences of the past cannot be undone, memories and emotions are malleable.

How is all this related to art? As Berger explained, “public monuments, the fine arts and music have all been hugely influential in putting forward and emphasizing national narratives.”⁵⁹ Art is one way in which images that deal with the nation, nationalism, and national identity are circulated in everyday situations.

For example, on August 31, 2013, MNAC opened an exhibition titled *A Visit to the Romanesque. In company of Antoni Tàpies*. The show worked to connect a cohesive national history through visual art, unifying the past with the present. The objective of this exhibition, as the museum described, was twofold: “to offer a contemporary look at medieval art, and at the

⁵⁵ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁶ Tim Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*, (New York: Berg, 2002), 140.

⁵⁷ Mees, “Emociones en política. Conceptos, debates y perspectivas analíticas,” 36.

⁵⁸ Quiroga, “The Three Spheres...,” 693.

⁵⁹ Berger et al., *Narrating the Nation*, 9.

same time to enrich Tàpies's universe with elements linking it to the art of the past."⁶⁰ The image that accompanied the text that announced the show subtly introduced an intermediary figure in the chain of Catalan artists (figure 1). Hanging from a rope that splits the canvas in half, the red wool peasant's hat (*barretina*) links the art of Tàpies to his compatriot Miró. The earth colored background, which supports the stagnant pendulum that the rope and hat create, is a recycled medieval piece, which echoes the colors of the Romanesque works celebrated at the museum.



Figure 1- Antoni Tàpies, detail from *Pintura romànica i barretina*, 1971

⁶⁰ Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, *Tàpies. From Within*, accessed July 21, 2014, <http://museunacional.cat/en/tapies-within-3>.

Walls, time, and tradition are all themes that Tàpies's *Pintura romànica i barretina* embody. The 1971 artwork, in the context of this 2013-2014 exhibition, recapitulated the idea that the aesthetics of Catalonia are unique and traceable to a distant past. Ideologically bonding contemporary images with those of the past is a nationalist tactic that seeks to disguise a complex national history as a neat fusion of linear history. The image, as MNAC displayed in the exhibition, exemplifies Billig's concept of banal nationalism, as the *barretina* is physically and ideologically tied to a historic work of art from the same imagined community.

Pintura romànica i barretina embodies the central themes of this investigation. Tàpies's unique style, which the French critic Michel Tapié described in the 1950s as “*art autre*” [other art], was a response to avant-garde artistic movements developing both in Europe and in the United States during the twentieth century. Geometric Abstraction and Abstract Expressionism were inadequate modes for what Tàpies's creations sought to accomplish. What Tapié once coined as other art, Martine Heredia categorized as Informalism, an artistic style that is not a trend with limits, but an enduring alternative to parallel movements developing after the Second World War.⁶¹ This canvas contains informalist elements; it is minimalist, pared down to a few essential components that are recognizable yet organized in an unordinary fashion. His rejection of conventional beauty in favor of a worn, highly textured, and dirty aesthetic forces the viewer to think beyond the surface of his art. The light brown, decaying background from an original Romanesque piece of little value and an old rope are not necessarily beautiful. However, his commitment to political subjects demonstrates the artist's dedication to support a democratic and peaceful community, which he clarified in a number of his written works and published interviews.⁶² Without that artist's written statements, much of his art would be rather unapproachable.⁶³ His extensive writing, however, bolsters the philosophical depth of his canvases. The red hat has historically been identified with peasants in Catalonia. Here, it is in an

⁶¹ Martine Heredia, *Tàpies, Saura, Millares: L'art informel en Espagne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires Vincennes, 2013), 8.

⁶² See: Antoni Tàpies, *Complete Writings Volume I. A Personal Memoir: Fragments for an Autobiography* (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 2009a), *Complete Writings Volume II. Collected Essays* (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 2009b), *El tatuaje y el cuerpo: Antoni Tàpies conversaciones con Manuel Borja-Villel* (Barcelona: Rosa Cúbica, 2005); and Catoir, *Conversations with Antoni Tàpies*.

⁶³ Tàpies, in an interview with Barbara Catoir, spoke about why he decided to begin writing about his work: “...the reason why I took up the pen was that I wanted to state my point of view in a Catalan magazine at a time when the entire cultural life of Barcelona was dominated by a single prominent critic, Alexandre Cirici... to show young artists and younger people in general who were interested in art that Cirici's pontifications were not the only legitimate options.” Catoir, *Conversations with Antoni Tàpies*, 108.

awkward position, without an owner, the hat is separated from an ordinary place. It is an anti-portrait. We are left to wonder whose hat that is and why it wound up tied from a rope. Ambiguity is one of Tàpies's trademarks, which he used to invite spectators, allowing them freedom to engage and learn with minimal restraints. *Pintura romànica i barretina* could be a play on Miró's *Cap de pagès català* paintings (figures 2 and 3). These portraits from 1925 are highly simplified compositions that are just as much about the act of representation as they are about Catalan peasants. Tàpies's picture can also be read as the aftermath of a hanging, the quiet, spooky wake of an intolerable and dramatic means of punishment. The hanging red hat could take on the role of an inert pendulum, frozen in time. The inability to pin down one specific vision of Tàpies's red *barretina* dangling from a rope, and countless other works, is an intentional tactic that seeks to provoke reflection. Informalism, political content, and ambiguity



Figure 2- Joan Miró, *Cap de pagès català*, 1925, Penrose collection, London (left)

Figure 3- Joan Miró, *Cap de pagès català*, 1925, Collection Gerard Bonnier, Stockholm (right)

are all elements that run through the extensive oeuvre of Tàpies. Furthermore, themes of time and space are often employed and important in the consideration of different exhibitions of the artist's works, which will encourage new readings of pictures such as *Pintura romànica i barretina*.

Using a theoretical foundation from James C. Scott's *Dominance and the Art of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, it becomes clear as to why Tàpies made thousands of surprisingly similar compositions over the course of his lifetime. Scott's theory concerns power relations and the behind-the-scenes dynamic that exists before a public denunciation against a dominant power.⁶⁴ While Scott's examples concern tactics such as coded language, storytelling and rumors, art is a type of visual language that can contribute to the culture of each position within a disparate social situation. Plastic art communicates ideas that can alter opinions, perceptions, and shift perspectives. Read alongside Scott's framework, Tàpies's oeuvre could be understood as an elusive yet fierce denunciation of the Franco regime. What *Dominance and the Art of Resistance* left out, however, is what happens after a dramatic public rebuke or shift in power. After the death of the dictator, who had led Spain's government for the better part of Tàpies's life, how did his developed transcript change throughout the transition to democracy and into the 1980s? Style is a key component in any artist's work and Tàpies's style, remarkably, did not waver during this period.

Homi Bhabha's theory concerning nations and nationalism has also been a valuable tool for analysis. I have investigated the relationship between Tàpies and Catalan society, the history of the region as well as the artist's ideas concerning its future. The artist, as a member of the Catalan community, used art to communicate his political identity and desires in a strategic manner. While Bhabha looked to literature to demonstrate how the idea of the nation is conceived of and perpetuated in literary terms, his ideas are applicable in the plastic arts.⁶⁵ Tàpies, like Miró before him, engaged with a multiplicity of times, "Janus-faced" times that contribute to the idea that the nation is a physical (as opposed to ideological) entity that simultaneously looks towards both a grand history *and* unified future, as Tom Nairn suggested.⁶⁶ For Bhabha, these double times have been expressed in literature as what he coined as the

⁶⁴ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

⁶⁵ Homi Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

⁶⁶ Tom Nairn, *The Break up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism* (London: New Left Books, 1977).

“pedagogical” and “performative,” strategic elements that ultimately enable the ability of national myths to flourish in the contemporary imagination. Tàpies made works of art that fuse these elements. This study will illuminate how national tales concerning the past and future of Catalonia have impacted the artist and his work.

I bridge Murray Edelman’s discussion of how meaning is produced through the structures of certain spaces and Tim Edensor’s argument concerning national spaces and places in order to critically examine public works of art that Tàpies created during the 1990s and into the first few years of the twenty-first century.⁶⁷ This is something that has not yet been explored regarding Tàpies’s work. It is both an interesting and relevant topic because the artist did not accept just any sort of commission and the location of his exhibitions primed viewers in different ways. Both physical and geographic spaces are critical factors to analyze regarding Tàpies’s work. He deliberately chose to show in and around Barcelona while collaborating to create exhibitions beyond his birthplace, most frequently in Paris or New York City. His public works, typically rather large in scale, have created previously nonexistent environments which, in turn, affect the ways in which individuals understand the function of those particular spaces. The formal characteristics of Tàpies’s artworks are only part of the bigger picture, which includes the ways in which visual material is accessible to beholders. This study critically examines the content and context of public works and exhibitions and how their spatial distribution and geographic location affect the ways in which the artist’s work has been presented to the public.

Concepts that Anderson, Billig, Gellner, Hobsbawm, and Quiroga have worked to define form the foundation of my methodology, which engages with theories proposed by Berger, Billig, Bhabha, Edelman, Edensor, Quiroga, and Scott. Art historical investigations published by Conversi, Lubar, and McCarthy have served as models that critically examine the relations between the visual arts and politics. My method of analysis includes traditional art historical formal analyses of particular works of art, sociopolitical contextualization of those works, and the application of several theories to demonstrate the direct and bilateral relationship between art and politics. This is a way to provide a more comprehensive examination of the art of Antoni Tàpies while situating his body of work outside the traditional art historical perspective. As Sabina Mihelj discussed in *Media Nations*, culture cannot be understood as a “mere by-product

⁶⁷ Edelman, *From Art to Politics*; Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*.

of power relationships.”⁶⁸ The study of art and culture should not become isolated from wider sociopolitical contexts.

Finally, The perspective of this investigation stems from Ferran Archilés’s and Miguel Ángel del Arco Blanco’s works. Both have outlined constructive ways to comprehend history. Archilés emphasized the shared relationships between historical perspective, the cultural arena, and the national experience in an article that examines the languages and experiences of the nation and the processes of nationalization.⁶⁹ He explained that culture structures what an individual considers normal, correct, novel, or valuable; culture also structures the way that that person understands their relationship to the abstract idea of the nation. This relates to artistic exhibitions as a form of cultural expression that citizens are exposed to, particularly in metropolitan areas. Culture is not limited to the arts, but also deals with how individuals go about their daily lives and make sense of their experiences. Archilés’s ideas help explain why some individuals may perceive a Tàpies show as a form of nationalization, while others may see the same show as having little to do with the idea of the nation.

In a historiographical chapter on Cultural Studies, del Arco wrote how the discipline utilizes particular viewpoints to examine the interactions between culture, power, and society. Historians, he stated, ought to keep this in mind as they write history.⁷⁰ While history tends to focus on realities of the past, the interdisciplinary nature of cultural studies allows for greater attention to both historical realities and fictions. In order to accurately represent the past, del Arco expressed that we must take into consideration two narratives: the ‘realist’ history that is pieced together using primary sources and the world of fiction and imagination which permits reality to seep in.⁷¹ Art engages in both of these realms. However, attention is too often focused on the creative and imaginary aspect of visual culture. I am not solely interested in the imaginative spaces that Tàpies created from unusual materials like marble dust; I also want to explain some of the real political processes that conditioned the ways in which Tàpies worked.

⁶⁸ Sabina Mihelj, *Media Nations: Communicating Belonging and Exclusion in the Modern World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 10.

⁶⁹ Ferran Archilés, “Lenguajes de nación. Las ‘experiencias de nación’ y los procesos de nacionalización: propuestas para un debate,” *Ayer* 90; 2 (2013), 100.

⁷⁰ Miguel Ángel del Arco Blanco, “Un paso más allá de la historia cultural: los *cultural studies*,” Teresa María Ortega López, (ed.), *Por una historia global. El debate historiográfico en los últimos tiempos* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2007), 20.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

This study combines Archilés and del Arco's approaches to analyze history, both of which focus on culture and its polyvalent nature in order to cognize the past.

However, the limits of this sort of analysis have to do with the subjectivity of images and the fact that personal experiences affect how individuals respond emotionally and interpret visual material in different spaces, places, and moments in time. Museums and galleries create a space where visitors can think about and criticize artworks, but visitors may not consider what specific cultural and historical perspectives affect the way that they experience art; they may not reflect on the institution that created the exhibition and how it structures knowledge; finally, they may not separate the 'real' (historical) from the imaginary (fiction) while viewing works of art in a museum setting or controlled environment. In analyzing the multiple layers at work in the context of an artistic exhibition, it becomes possible to expose unforeseen or subtle ways in which images impact the conception of beholder's ideas and identities in addition to their relationship to the society in which they live.

1.5 Sources

"The Visualization of a Nation: Tàpies and Catalonia" is a multidisciplinary study that draws from art history, theories of nationalism, political science, and social theories. Primary sources include artworks, artist statements, interviews, exhibition publications, media publications, public education textbooks, public records, and public surveys. Researching in the archive and library at the Fundació Antoni Tàpies has been an essential part of this investigation. Not only does the library include all of Tàpies's own works and writings, it also includes books and documents from his personal collection. The archive preserves copies of newspaper articles, comics, exhibition material, photographs, and unpublished sketches from various projects. The tremendous quantity of articles from different periodicals, particularly from the early 1990s, is astonishing. Going through many of these publications has been a remarkably time-consuming yet ultimately rewarding experience. Although this archive has been fundamental to this investigation, it lacks much information about Tàpies's public works. I hoped to find documents regarding public commissions, contracts, contracts, and preliminary sketches but was disappointed to find that the Fundació Antoni Tàpies does not currently hold this sort of

information. Furthermore, some of his public works are not actually accessible to the public. The foundation used to organize visits through Barcelona that would allow people to see such works that pertain to the Generalitat and Universitat Pompeu Fabre, but they no longer do this. The foundation appointed Charles Guerra as their new director in 2015 and it will be interesting to see what sort of changes he proposes for the institution in the coming years.

Other archives in the Catalan capital have been fruitful, particularly that of the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), the Arxiu Fotogràfic de Barcelona, and the Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona. MACBA's archive includes more than a dozen letters and postcards that Tàpies wrote to his friend, a Catalan poet, Joan Brossa. What is remarkable about their correspondences is that they discussed ideas above all else. MACBA also has letters from Brossa to Tàpies, in which he wrote about his thoughts and feelings concerning literary and aesthetic styles. The photographic archive preserves a significant number of original black and white images of the artist and his family, many of which had been published in periodicals during the 1980s and 1990s.

The Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió has published results from their surveys online, which has been a useful way to measure public opinions concerning the nation of Catalonia and how its citizens feel about its relationship to Spain. The Generalitat de Catalunya has sent me information concerning financial contributions that the regional government has made to fund the Fundació Antoni Tàpies, but has not been helpful in answering my questions regarding contracts that were made between the Generalitat and the artist. When asked about information related to commissioned works from the 1990s, civil servants working for the Generalitat were unable to find answers to basic questions. New York art gallery Dia:Beacon, Bilbao's Guggenheim Museum, and MNAC have all provided valuable information and statistics concerning the attendance of various exhibitions.

Secondary sources consist of art historical scholarship, political and social histories of Catalonia, historical and social theories, articles and comics from periodicals, magazine publications, documentaries, websites, and interviews. Academic sources concerning Tàpies are scarce and many of the publications that have accompanied exhibitions and introductory essays in the eight volumes of Tàpies's complete works have been written by just a few different authors (Agustí, Combalía, Enguita Mayo, Permanyer, and Miquel Tàpies). Tàpies often appeared in national periodicals such as: *ABC*, *Ara*, *Avui*, *Diari de Barcelona*, *El Mundo*, *El*

Observador, *El País*, *Punt Diari*, *El Periódico*, and *La Vanguardia*. International papers also covered some stories about the artist and his work such as *Miami Herald*, *The New York Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. Finally, I have found useful information in magazines such as *Artinfo*, *The Burlington Magazine*, *Destino*, *Goya*, and *Kalías*. These sorts of contemporary accounts have played a major role in my analysis, specifically related to Tàpies's public works. The Fundació Antoni Tàpies has preserved a great quantity of press related to the artist, although I have also accessed many of these periodicals through their online databases.

Documentaries and other films about the life and work of Antoni Tàpies have also informed this study. Gregory Rood directed *Tàpies*, which was televised in 1990 in Catalonia and the United Kingdom.⁷² The film opens with Tàpies speaking in Catalan about how he believes that art is able to transform people's consciences and vacillates between footage of the artist talking and working. Carolina Tubau directed the 2009 *Te de Tàpies* in collaboration with Televisió de Catalunya.⁷³ *Te de Tàpies* focuses on the sources that the artist used and how he saw his work as connected to the natural world. Both documentaries have provided insight concerning the way in which Tàpies talked about his work, which is similar, but not exactly the same as the way in which he wrote about his art. Shortly after the artist passed away in 2012, Ateneu Barcelonès organized and filmed a series of lectures, *En record d'Antoni Tàpies*.⁷⁴ The act included nearly a dozen different speakers (including artists and politicians, among others), who presented ideas about Tàpies, his art, and his legacy.

On February 4, 2016 I interviewed the artist's son, Toni Tàpies, in Barcelona.⁷⁵ I also spoke with the current Director of MNAC Pepe Serra and politician Joan Guitart.⁷⁶ Before becoming director of MNAC in 2011, Serra had worked: in MACBA's curatorial department, for Fundació La Caixa, in the Generalitat's Departament de Cultura, and as director of Barcelona's Museu Picasso. Guitart worked in politics from 1978 to 1996. In the Generalitat, he led the department of education from 1980-1988 and the department de culture from 1988-1996. He went on to lead MNAC's board of trustees from 1996-2004, while simultaneous serving as the Vice President of the Fundació Mútua General de Catalunya, a medical insurance company. The

⁷² *Tàpies*, Gregory Rood, (dir.), BBC and TVE Catalunya, 1990.

⁷³ *Te de Tàpies*, Carolina Tubau, (dir.), Televisió de Catalunya, 2009.

⁷⁴ *En record d'Antoni Tàpies*, Ateneu Barcelonès, March 3, 2012.

⁷⁵ Interview with Toni Tàpies, February 4, 2016. See: Appendix A.

⁷⁶ Interview with Pepe Serra on June 27, 2016 and Joan Guitart on July 12, 2016.

conversations I had with Toni Tàpies, Pepe Serra, and Joan Guitart have been vital to this investigation.

Finally, the Biblioteca Nacional and the library at the Reina Sofía in Madrid have been excellent spaces to consult research material. Combining information from several archives and libraries ranging from various disciplines has allowed for a comprehensive analysis concerning Tàpies's work and its social functions.

Still, I was unsuccessful in finding adequate answers to a handful of questions. Most of these questions concern public works of art, contracts, commissions, and financial information. For example, the Arxiu fotogràfic de Barcelona has a photograph of Tàpies signing an agreement with the Generalitat to create a large-scale work of art in 1989, but I have not been able to find any information concerning the conditions of that contract. Another unanswered question has to do with a proposal on behalf of the Ayuntamiento de Madrid for Tàpies to create a mural for the Madrid-Barajas airport. The artist refused to make the mural, although I have not found a single source that contains more specific details about the project. These types of questions are important for two major reasons: finding answers will enable a greater understanding of the intersections between art and politics in Spain and they involve information about public spending, which ought to be available to the public.

An article from *The New York Times* that discusses new sculptures in Barcelona, as symbols of “civic pride” provides a hint of insight as to why some of my questions remain unanswered.⁷⁷ In 1990, Edward Schumacher claimed in “Sculptures Are Changing the Look of Barcelona” that the city’s public art “...program still has no budget and no formal screening commission.... The money, taken from different city budgets as needed, is often said to come from what city officials call the ‘disaster budget’— a fund to undo what Franco did to the city.”⁷⁸ If this was the case, it would explain why some of the contracts and financial information that I am interested in has proved impossible to find. However, there were, at some point, documents concerning Tàpies and the regional and local governments, which I believe still exist somewhere.

⁷⁷ Edward Schumacher, “Sculptures Are Changing the Look of Barcelona,” *The New York Times*, September 4, 1990, accessed August 27, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/09/04/arts/sculptures-are-changing-the-look-of-barcelona.html>.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

1.6 Framework

“The Visualization of a Nation: Tàpies and Catalonia” is organized chronologically. The second and third chapters cover the early stylistic development of the artist in the 1950s, his mid-career presence in Catalan society as a reputable living artist, and art he created in the 1970s and 1980s with respect to the transition to democracy in Spain (1975-1978).

Before reading Tàpies’s visual language, I have found it useful to look back to previous generations of artists working in Catalonia. In the early twentieth century, figures such as Joaquim Sunyer and Joaquín Torres-García established an aesthetic in Catalonia that Miró and Tàpies ultimately sought to reinvent. Furthermore, both did so while engaging with a greater community, the art world, and pushing painting to previously unthinkable frontiers.

There is a tremendous history of painting linked to the Catalan landscape and its inhabitants. Landscape painting worked in tandem with nationalist groups in order to glorify and solidify a cohesive visual representation of the national territory during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Ángel Duarte analyzed the changing nature of the Catalan landscape after the fall of the Second Spanish Republic in literature for youth education.⁷⁹ What once aggrandized the lands of the Catalan people quickly transformed to fit the agenda of the early Franco regime: Spain is part of the historic Mediterranean cradle of civilization and Catalonia is a region within “immortal Spain.”⁸⁰ Works by Joaquim Sunyer and Joaquín Torres-García that include picturesque scenes in the Catalan landscape were established norms that both Miró and Tàpies were working against, effectively disturbing the conventions of art that the *noucentistas* sought to perpetuate well into the twentieth century.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Ángel Duarte, “El catalán en su paisaje. Algunas notas sobre los usos del imaginario del paisaje catalán, y catalanista, en el primer franquismo,” *Historia y Política* 14 (2005).

⁸⁰ Duarte, “El catalán en su paisaje,” 187.

⁸¹ Torres-García reworked the French murals of Puvis de Chavannes in order to decorate the Saló de Sant Jordi in the Palau de la Generalitat de Catalonia. His fresco *Catalunya Eterna* (1912-1916) presents the image of ancient civilization, calling on Greek and Roman architectural and philosophical motifs to project an aura of excellence. However, Torres-García quickly abandoned this new century style, in favor of a more spontaneous, dynamic aesthetic that could depict the curiosities of the sights, sounds, smells, and rhythms of urban Barcelona. Torres-García’s break with the *Noucentisme* pictorial agenda coincided with the first 1917 publication of his “Art-Evolution” in *Un Enemic del Poble*. It is unclear whether this break prompted the essay, or if the essay announced his severance. Another possible stimulus for this stylistic shift could have been the artist’s interactions with his compatriot Barradas who moved to Barcelona in 1916. Having spent time in Italy before moving to the Iberian Peninsula, Barradas appropriated stylistic techniques from the futurist work that he saw there. Together, Barradas and Torres-García developed a fusion of Futurist and Cubist approaches to represent the city of Barcelona. They called this new method *Vibrationisme* [Vibrationism].

Before Miró's death in 1983, Tàpies had already established himself as the new referential artist in Catalonia. In addition to his growing international status as a European informalist, this phase in Tàpies's career is particularly rich. While he had already found his token style during the 1950s, the artist continued to work consistently within the same framework despite the changing political environment after the death of Francisco Franco in 1975. Chapters 2 and 3 discuss why the artist chose not to evolve his style and how his images project particular political ideologies.

These first chapters primarily focus on the formal characteristics of Tàpies's work, their relation to his personal beliefs concerning society, and his acceptance within Catalonia as a contemporary artist. In 1983 the Ajuntament de Barcelona commissioned the painter to create a three-dimensional monument to honor the life and works of Picasso. Public artworks like this one helped to establish Tàpies's stature in Spain. These sections discuss the importance of the 1984 establishment of the Fundació Antoni Tàpies in the context of art history as well as the composition of the cosmopolitan city of Barcelona. The examination of style, time, and social stimuli in Chapter 2 "Unchanging in an Era of Change" and Chapter 3 "An Icon in the Making" establishes a base for a more specifically political analysis throughout the remainder of the study.

Chapter 4 "A New Foundation and an Old Sock" and Chapter 5 "The Visualization of a Catalan Nation" deal with the relationship between the artist and public institutions. Chapter 4 opens with a discussion about an enormous mural *Les quatre cròniques* (1990, figure 4), which references Catalan manuscripts written between the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This work is housed in Barcelona's Palau de la Generalitat, the seat of the Catalan government, and often appears in the media behind politicians meeting at a large, round table in front of the painting. Both chapters explore the Catalan government's promotion of the artist both financially and institutionally, concluding with an analysis of Tàpies's cover design for the 2006 Statute of Autonomy (figure 5), which defines Catalonia as a nation in the preamble. Tàpies's *Les quatre cròniques* and his 2006 cover design are visually vague yet tied to contemporary Catalan politics. Chapters 4 and 5 will examine how the artist's work relates to nationalist narratives concerning the past and future of Catalonia and how different government bodies have looked to the artist's in order to promote particular ideas via the visual arts.



Figure 4- Antoni Tàpies, *Les quatre cròniques*, 1990

Chapter 6 “The Context of Artistic Content” and Chapter 7 “Art as a Nationalizing Tool” discuss twenty-first century exhibition practices including Tàpies’s work in and beyond Catalonia. Over the past decade, the political environment in Catalonia has shifted in a manner that would have seemed rather unimaginable during the final years of the twentieth century. As many Catalan nationalists have been demonstrating a desire to separate from the Spain, pressure has been placed on public figures and institutions to take sides. Critically examining the exhibition practices of MNAC, in comparison to other major museums, is essential in order to demonstrate how context affects the reception of art in society. The incessant assault of mass media and advertisement that has dominated twenty-first century North American and European cultures greatly impacts how beholders conceptualize works of art. Looking at the words “*Visca Catalunya*” [Long live Catalonia] scratched on an enormous wood panel in a 2014 exhibition in Bilbao suggests a meaning that is quite different from what that same panel would have signified

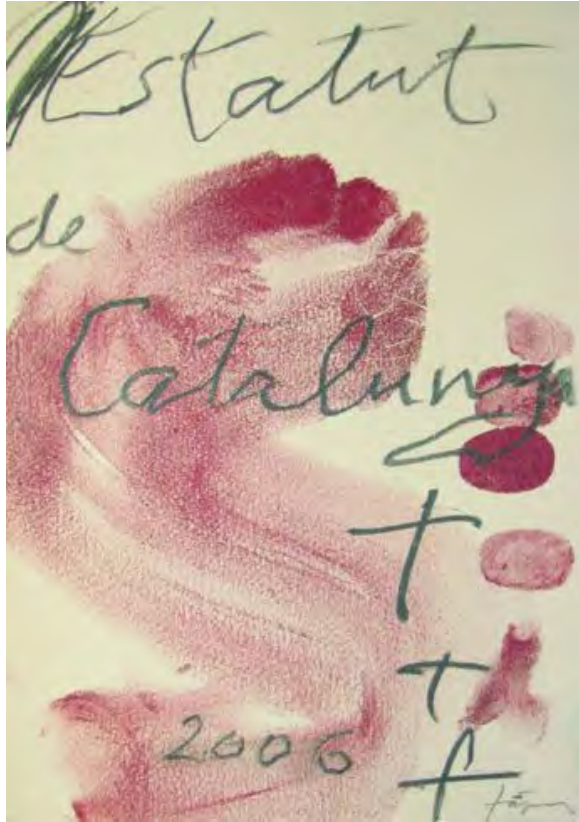


Figure 5- Antoni Tàpies, *Portada de l'Estatut d'Autonomia de Catalunya*, 2006

in Barcelona during the 1970s (*L'esperit català*, 1971, figure 6). Time and space are equally important in these chapters, as I demonstrate how each affects the ideas that art and exhibitions generate, perpetuate, change, or confirm.

Chapters 6 and 7 highlight political positioning regarding the presentation of art. They characterize the rather tangled web of politics that engulfs the final years of Tàpies's career and the first post-mortem exhibitions of his works. Both identity and feeling of national belonging are relevant issues in the analysis of public art exhibitions. The original context of artworks are simply impossible to recreate, therefore curators work to project meaning concerning numerous already decontextualized objects. For the viewer, time is compressed, as they move freely between works that, in the case of some retrospective

shows, span several decades. Experiencing art in this manner, along with texts concerning the theme and selected groups within the space, conveys ideas about the value of art, artistic identity, national pride, and personal taste. In a museum setting all spectators are able to openly criticize artworks, but how often do they consider how culture affects their experience or how the organization that created the exhibition plays a role in structuring knowledge? Art can contribute to what Sebastian Balfour and Alejandro Quiroga defined as “new layers of identity,”⁸² that ultimately transform and replace previous, less dynamic individual and social conceptions of the self. These chapters are supported by Hall's definition of ideology as “mental frameworks— the languages, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation— which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render

⁸² Balfour and Quiroga, *The Reinvention of Spain*, 204.



Figure 6- Antoni Tàpies, *L'esperit català*, 1971

intelligible the way society works”⁸³ and how art and institutions relate to the tensions that exist between ideas about: individual and community, private and public, traditional and novel, and national and global.

The final chapter revisits the initial research questions and hypotheses, offering both specific and general conclusions. Furthermore, it provides a theory for future studies relating to the interconnectedness between the visual arts and national ideologies and identities. The scheme, in the case of Tàpies, is cyclical, reinforcing a visual language concerning his own preoccupations. His works of art, in addition to the public commissions and exhibitions that he was involved with, are products of particular social and political circumstances. This is no different from any other artist, in that the conditions under which an artist is born into are inescapable. Through the public display of Tàpies’s art, he built a visual language distinct from

⁸³ Stuart Hall, “The Question of Cultural Identity,” Stuart Hall, (ed.), *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 26.

his contemporaries. He repeated that language throughout the course of his life, despite great sociopolitical changes. The institutional support that Tàpies received strengthened his repertoire as an innovative and internationally recognized artist and contributed to the value, both monetary and ideological, of the artist's oeuvre. The vast majority of his artworks, because of their style, are contingent upon the particular historical context of Tàpies's early career. However, the nature of their relationship to politics is reciprocal. They are not a mere effect or reflection of the time and place of their creation, but an active part of an endlessly evolving visual language. Their meanings are purposely unfixed yet undoubtedly political.

I have created a general theory of this concept: art is always political; its exhibition and/or public patronage is also political and facilitates the construction of a visual language made accessible to different audiences; that language is part of how individuals (including artists) understand their relationship to society; the 'meaning' of the language is never static nor fixed and is dependent on an individual's personal experiences; the language is then susceptible to reconstruction, transformation, modification, or replication. Politics are embedded throughout this model, as they are inseparable from the act of making, commissioning, and showing works of art. Similarly, art affects political ideas concerning how society functions and what concepts people consider to be 'normal.' The relationship between art and politics is bilateral, as this study demonstrates. It is my hope that "The Visualization of a Nation: Tàpies and Catalonia" starts a new chapter of academic work concerning the political nature of the artist's works because, as Lubar stated over two decades ago, Antoni Tàpies deserves far more.

2 Unchanging in an Era of Change

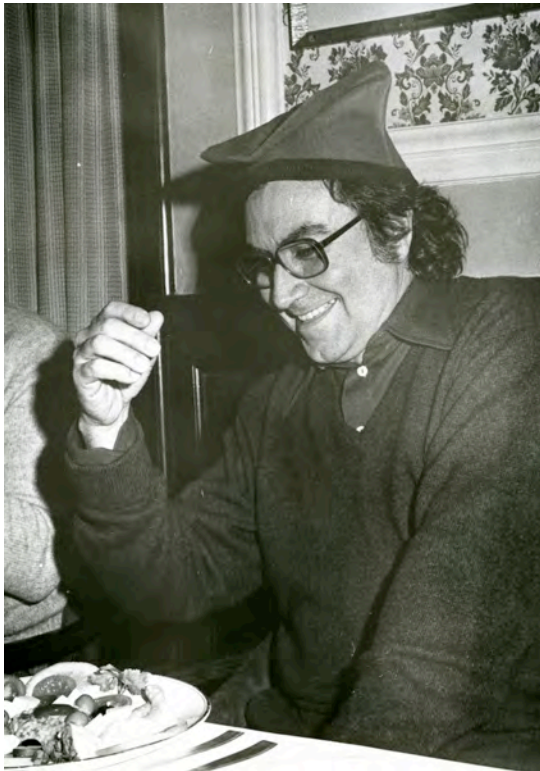


Figure 7- Photograph of Antoni Tàpies wearing a *barretina*, *Diario de Barcelona* March 14, 1976, Arxiu Fotogràfic de Barcelona

“Tàpies’s greatest achievement was *la coherencia*, in his works of art as well as his discourse.”

Joan Guitart¹

This chapter focuses on style and the indirect implications of politics made visible through art. Tàpies infused political ideology and cultural identity into his art before, during, and after the transition to democracy in Spain. Surprisingly, the formal characteristics of his artwork are tremendously consistent despite major sociopolitical transformations after the death of Franco in 1975. Was he ‘successful’ in communicating what he desired in visual terms? Not always. However, his characteristically dull and dirty compositions, upon which he established his international artistic career,

did position Tàpies among the most admired of Catalan painters during the 1970s and 1980s. “Unchanging in an Era of Change” explores the stylistic uniformity of the artist. The first section outlines the early career of the artist and how he developed a groundbreaking style that stemmed from experimentations with Surrealism and the iconography of fellow Catalan artist, Joan Miró. The second section compares artworks created during the final five years of the Franco dictatorship with others made during and after the transition. The objective is to present an in-depth analysis of Tàpies’s style using a holistic perspective in order to explain why his art looks the way that it does and how personal and sociopolitical circumstances shaped Tàpies’s early career.

¹ Interview with Joan Guitart, July 12, 2016.

2.1 From Surrealism to Informalism (1946-1956)

In order to assess Tàpies's style during the height of his career as a visual artist in the 1970s and 1980s, it is useful to first consider some of his early works. Before delving into some of the most productive years of his life, looking at a few of his first compositions will establish a foundation for the observation of art created during an era of great political change in Spain. This section highlights a handful of drawings and paintings that Tàpies created in the early stages of his career and serves to help situate the main concerns of this chapter, style and artworks produced during the 1970s and 1980s.

There is a great distinction between Tàpies's earliest works and what art historians refer to as his "Matter Paintings"² of the 1950s. In his doctoral thesis, Manuel Borja-Villel discussed the rupture between Tàpies's "surrealist" compositions made from 1946 to 1953 and the origins of his trademark style from 1953 to 1956. At the beginning of his artistic career, Tàpies formed part of a group publishing an avant-garde magazine *Dau al Set* [Seventh Side of the Die], composed of the philosopher Arnau Puig, the poet Joan Brossa, and a number of other visual and musical artists, founded in 1948 in Barcelona. Tàpies's involvement in this group certainly shaped some of his first artistic creations, not unlike Miró's relationship with avant-garde circles before the Spanish Civil War. This is most evident in his works before 1954, as they often demonstrated affinity with surrealist and dadaist art. For example, *Els solcs* (1952, figure 8) depicts a head in profile with two outstretched arms; one is holding wheat and the other is clutching a sickle to cut it. A red blob connected to the top of the head is a stylized *barretina*. The wonky figure is hardly grounded in a flat, unrealistic landscape made from shapes in shades of gold and yellow. Four red stripes cut through the bottom of the canvas, simultaneously signifying the rows of crops in a tilled field and the stripes of the Catalan flag. This painting has little to do with Tàpies's mature works. It is an example of his early attraction to Surrealism, a style in which he quickly abandoned.

² For more on Tàpies's early Matter Paintings, see: Borja-Villel, "Antoni Tàpies: The 'Matter Paintings.'"



Figure 8- Antoni Tàpies, *Els solcs*, 1952

One of the reasons that Tàpies moved away from surrealist compositions was his friendship with Brossa, one of the founders of Dau al Set. The two men often exchanged ideas, some of are preserved as written correspondences. During the early 1950s Brossa and Tàpies wrote numerous letters and notes discussing artistic exhibitions, gallery tendencies, and future plans. One particularly intriguing postcard that Tàpies wrote on Christmas Day in 1950 has an image of Joan Miró's 1947 *L'oiseau comète et l'ombrelle fleurie* (figure 9).³ On the backside of the card, he wished Brossa happy holidays and explained that he had written to him ten days ago, but the mail was returned to him. The most interesting component of this card is the artist's signature. Tàpies replaced the first letter of his last name "T" with a pair of perpendicular lines intersecting to create four equal quadrants, "+".⁴

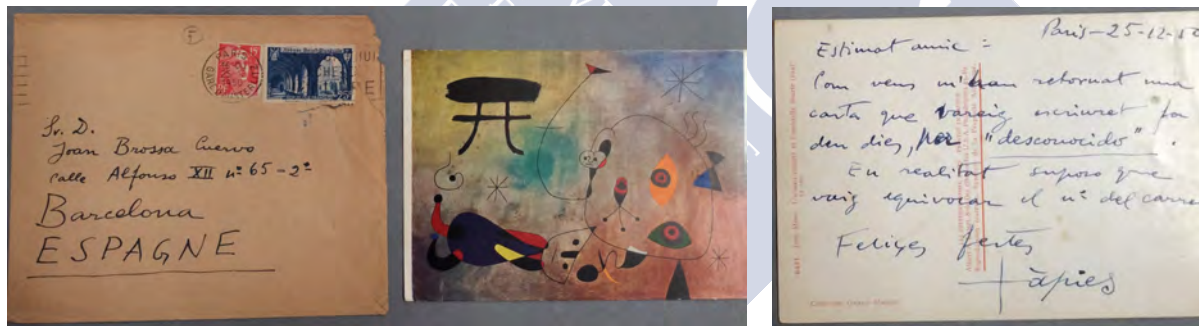


Figure 9- Antoni Tàpies, Postcard sent to Joan Brossa, December 25, 1950 (front with envelope and back), Arxiu MACBA

³ Antoni Tàpies letter to Joan Brossa, December 25, 1950, BROSSA_CORRES_PER_JB_BROSSA_00046_019, A.JBR.03528.020, L'Arxiu del Centre d'Estudis i documentació MACBA.

⁴ Both in December of 1950 and November of 1951, Brossa wrote letters to Tàpies using the "+" symbol with the remaining letters of the artist's last name. The gesture could affirm (or possibly poke fun) at Tàpies's own letters to Brossa and artworks containing the same sign (for example his 1950 self-portrait or his exhibition posters for the Galería Layetanas from the same year).

This sign, which Tàpies prolifically replicated in later works, is prominent in his newspaper collage *Creu de paper de diari* (1946-1947, figure 10) and his painted self-portrait (1950, figure 11). Catoir, speaking about the collage, claimed that this form “takes on an ambivalent symbolic significance,” yet she referenced the ancient art of orientation and the four points of the compass.⁵ The crossed lines of *Creu de paper de diari*, in Borja-Villel’s opinion, symbolized the fusion of the material and spiritual world, the physical realm represented in the form of a horizontal line and the ideological (or spiritual) via the vertical line.⁶ Tàpies was rather elusive when speaking about iconography in his own work. He discussed his early affinity for working in an “automatic, unconscious way.”⁷ At the same time, he has said that when he used a certain symbol, it was because it gave him pleasure.⁸ Art historians have verbalized various



Figure 10- Antoni Tàpies, *Creu de paper de diari*, 1946-1947 (left)

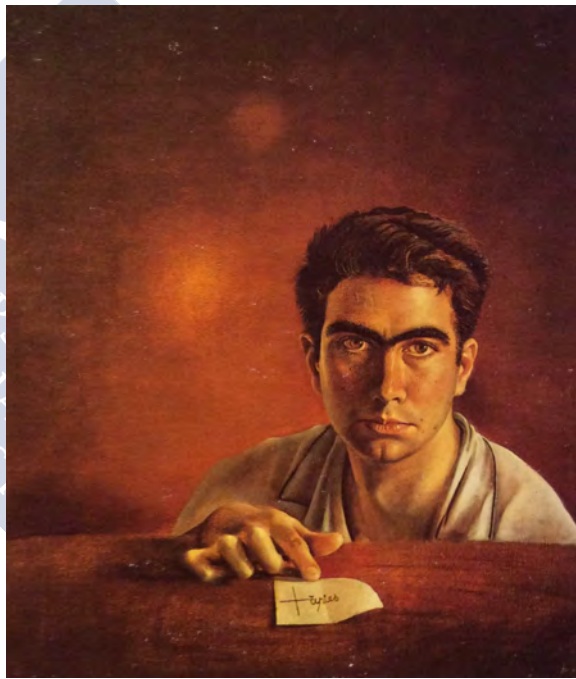


Figure 11- Antoni Tàpies, *Autoretrat*, 1950 (right)

⁵ Catoir, *Conversations with Antoni Tàpies*, 27.

⁶ Borja-Villel, *Fundació Antoni Tàpies*, 23.

⁷ Catoir, *Conversations with Antoni Tàpies*, 74.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 74.

interpretations of the “+” symbol in Tàpies’s work. Some have seen it as a self-referential mark, like a signature, referring to the first letter of Tàpies or Teresa, his wife; others pinned a meaning that deals with the convergence of spiritual and physical domains.⁹ I argue that those two crossed lines are a reference to Miró and a pair of paintings that he made many years earlier, while working in Paris.

In 1925 Miró worked on a series of paintings that demonstrate his commitment to experimentation in the process of art making. These images titled *Cap de pagès català* (figures 2 and 3) are paired down to a handful of signifying essentials. In the first, the *barretina* is connected only through a thin black line to the figure’s beard, shown as a triangular series of squiggly lines symmetrically centered on the canvas. Rosalind Krauss characterized the round, beady eyes as “radiating lines of vision” because of the various vectors that converge at their cores.¹⁰ Krauss also pointed out that these eyes are unequal in size, reading the painting as a “visual pun” that the artist created to the effect of an “imperceptible recession in space.”¹¹ This is characteristic of Miró’s body of work at this time, as he was toying with different modes of vision with a number of different canvases. For example, the second painting also works to disrupt any normative sense of visual space and depth through the mark of the horizon line that doubles as an indicator of the peasant’s face. Robin Greeley convincingly argued that these images are about Miró’s explorations within the act of picture making, “the figure becomes the site of pictorial experiments as to how insubstantial a painted mark can be before it collapses under the signifiatory weight placed on it.”¹² Both *Cap de pagès català* paintings open and close the depth of the canvas, depending on how the viewer reads the horizontal axis. At one point it signifies the infiniteness aspect of the horizon, but the same mark simultaneously grounds the floating peasant’s head. These canvases are intentionally ambiguous, provoking questions concerning their content and the processes of their creation.

It was in Paris where Miró found a style that simultaneously worked against the conservative formalism of the *noucentistas* and illustrated his sense of Catalan identity.¹³ The

⁹ See: Jeremy Roe, *Tàpies* (New York: Parkstone Press Ltd., 2006), 69; Catió, *Conversations with Tàpies*, 27; Borja-Villel, *Fundació Antoni Tàpies*, 23.

¹⁰ Krauss and Rowell, *Joan Miró: The Magnetic Fields*, 84.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹² Greeley, “Nationalism, Civil War and Painting: Joan Miró and Catalanisme in the 1930’s,” 25.

¹³ In 1906, Eugeni d’Ors i Rovira defined *noucentisme* through a series of daily columns in the newspaper *La Veu de Catalunya*. The main goal of the movement, with its title referencing the new century, was to develop a cohesive Catalan identity based on a collective culture. Backed by the right-winged party the *Lliga Regionalista*, *noucentisme*

forms of these “pictorial experiments” from 1925 are radically different from Miró’s illustrated works completed in Barcelona before he moved to Paris. Spending time abroad most likely changed his own conception of himself, his identification as a Catalan and as a Spaniard naturally would have become more central to his being once experiencing life amidst ‘others’ in Paris. Greeley distinguished an important transition point in the body of Miró’s work that cuts between his works from Barcelona, for example the cover of *Arc-Voltaic* (1918, figure 12), and these paintings he made in France that flirt with abstraction. She summarized Robert Lubar’s argument— that the artist’s early works demonstrate Miró’s search for an appropriate visual language to convey a contemporary Catalan “essence”— in order to show that Miró reversed the relationship between subject and object a few years after he left Barcelona. “...In the post-1923 paintings, the terms of Lubar’s claim get inverted. What might early on be described as Miró’s use of representation in the service of building a modern Catalan national identity, become nationalism in the service of representation.”¹⁴ Miró recognized this battlefield as an unfixed, transformative space that ought to be addressed in equally dynamic ways. In 1918, this took the form of a female nude as a means of attack against *noucentisme* aesthetics. In 1925, his subject matter became secondary to the modes of representation, as Greeley argued.¹⁵ After arriving in Paris, Miró no longer saw it as his primary task to combat *noucentisme* ideology. Instead, he confronted the act of painting itself, the primacy of the material, and the representational status of the sign. He pinned the face of the Catalan peasant to this project.

Miró’s objectives changed from confronting a dominant ideology to facing the medium in which he was working, which demonstrated his drive to discover an appropriate way to visually communicate his ideas. This artist’s commitment to contemporaneity did not cease in 1925. As Greeley has argued in *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War*, the 1930s presented a new challenge for Miró to face through painting. She showed that he was ultimately unable to find a

started as an idea around which the people of Catalonia would work to modernize their shared territory without losing sense of their Mediterranean heritage. D’Ors wrote about the social and civic responsibilities of art and culture in *La Veu*. Lubar, “Joan Miró before ‘The Farm,’ 1915-1922: Catalan Nationalism and the Avant-garde,” 5.

¹⁴ Greeley, “Nationalism, Civil War and Painting: Joan Miró and Catalanisme in the 1930’s,” 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.



**Figure 12- Joan Miró,
Cover illustration of Arc-Voltaic,
February 1918, Barcelona**

singular style “through which to address the cataclysm enveloping in his country [and this] suggests his ambivalence as to how to think visually about his own identity as a Catalan.”¹⁶ During the civil war in Spain, Miró worked and reworked his compositions, but he was simply unsuccessful in creating an image that ignited organized political action. His struggles speak to the importance that he placed on plasticity and on contemporaneity in terms of his artistic style and its relationship to the horrors of war taking place in his homeland. His contribution as a working artist was the visualization of his personal beliefs, accessible to an international audience via the Parisian art world. The *Cap de pagès català* paintings announce Miró’s impulse to internationalize himself and his art. Instead of taking on a rather simple problem concerning the direction of

contemporary art in Barcelona, his Catalan head canvases tackled the methods of painting itself.

Tàpies’s recycling of the two crossed lines, as seen in Miró’s *Cap de pagès català* paintings, function symbolically in multiple ways. The lines work as a signature identifying its maker, due to their ubiquitous use in other works. They also work to align Tàpies with Miró based on an ideological, as opposed to a purely visual, level. In 1920 Miró wrote a letter to his friend, also a Catalan painter, Enric Cristòfor Ricart that clarifies his mentality towards modernity and national identity:

I do not know what it is that makes people who lose contact with the world’s brain fall into a slumber and become mummies. No painter in Catalonia has arrived at maturity.... You have to be an International Catalan; a homespun Catalan is not, and never will be, worth anything in the world.¹⁷

Miró’s opinions were clear and direct. National culture is worthless if it exists in a vacuum. If the vision of a flourishing Catalan future is solely introspective, then it will remain stagnant and underdeveloped. Catalan leaders must direct their attention to the cultivation of their civilization

¹⁶ Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War*, 8.

¹⁷ Lubar, “Joan Miró before ‘The Farm,’ 1915-1922: Catalan Nationalism and the Avant-garde,” 183.

without losing sight of the increasingly globalized society developing around them. For Miró, this meant approaching painting with an experimental and progressive attitude. In Barcelona, it meant exhibiting Catalan culture as vital and valuable beyond its territorial boundaries.

Interestingly, Miró's ideas about art and its role in society, found in a letter from 1920, are quite close to those of Tàpies half a century later. Miró's thoughts about art are echoed in Tàpies's 1971 essay "Avant-Garde and the Catalan Spirit." He wrote that a great artist:

...with an ardent sense of what is ours and of the respect due to it, wants to recover and seek to perpetuate that ancestral song that invites the whole world to make the Catalan spirit its own, to become "Catalanist." Because for him this means, simply, keeping eternally alive that essential drive, in both love and war, in favor of humanism, democracy and freedom....¹⁸

In accord with the ideas of Miró, Tàpies set out to reinvent what these thoughts might look like. Just as Miró did before him, Tàpies rejected the soft, balanced, harmonious style of the *noucentistas*. In favor of an anti-aesthetic, he found the beautiful side of the ugly, the mundane, and the unremarkable. What Tàpies reused from Miró, albeit taking on an entirely different appearance, was a simple pair of crossed lines. Lines which, as we have seen, signify much more than the first letter of the artist's first name. They signify the processes of visual representation and the artist's ability to create and manipulate ideas in space.

In an undated letter, Brossa wrote to Tàpies stating that he had finally superseded his surrealist phase and that his poetry was moving in a new direction (figure 13).¹⁹ The letter is probably from 1950 or 1951, considering the content and the quantity of their written correspondences during these years. Furthermore, Tàpies also abandoned the surrealist style shortly after, between 1953 and 1954. Brossa's comments likely had much to do with that decision. In the undated letter, the poet also thanked Tàpies "for the Mirós," stating that seeing them made an impact on his heart.²⁰ This could refer to actual artworks that Tàpies gave to Brossa as a gift or, more likely, photographic reproductions of Miró's latest art shown in Paris, as both Miró and Tàpies were living in the French capital at the time. Finally, the letter

¹⁸ Tàpies, *Complete Writings Volume II. Collected Essays*, 160.

¹⁹ Joan Brossa letter to Antoni Tàpies, (195-), L'Arxiu del Centre d'Estudis i documentació MACBA.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

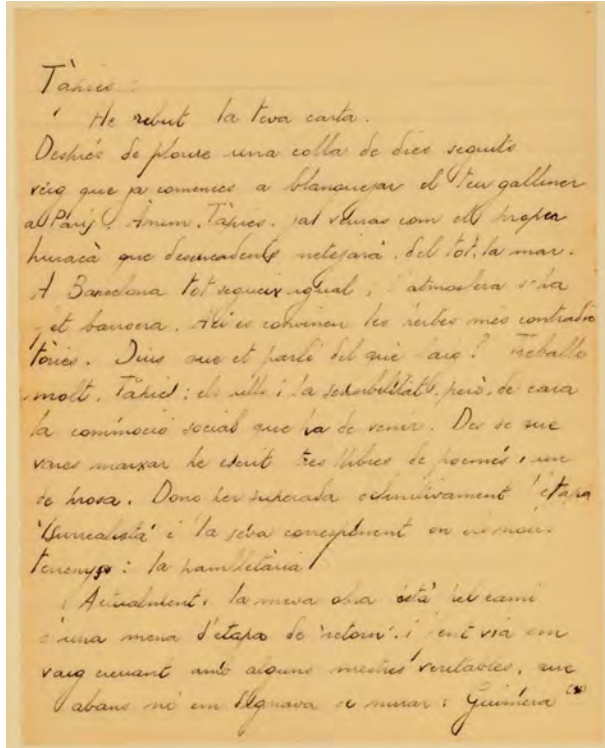


Figure 13- Joan Brossa, Letter sent to Antoni Tàpies, (195-), Arxiu MACBA

concluded with a powerful reminder. Brossa wrote, “do not forget, Tàpies, that art is a spiritual means of contact between people.”²¹

The letters between these two men demonstrate several points: both were concerned about one another’s style (visual and poetic), both admired the work of Miró, and both considered art a form of communication.

Ironically, Tàpies founded what art historians would later call Informalism via surrealist experimentation and iconography. Surmounting Surrealism, for Brossa in 1951 and for Tàpies shortly after, established new frontiers for both literary and visual culture in Catalonia. In the case of Tàpies, during his transition between quasi-surrealist compositions and his Matter Paintings, color was swapped for texture. During this change, Tàpies ditched one

of the most important formal characteristics of Miró’s work, bright primary colors, in order to obtain an entirely different aesthetic through an incongruous palette and through surface texture. Tàpies later explained in an interview with Catoir that he was allergic to color, that it is overused in advertising, and that he wanted to achieve a chromatic effect that exists “beneath the superficial appearance of reality, the color of dream and fantasy, the color of visions, the color of emptiness, the color of space.”²² One example that demonstrates this desire is *Terra i pintura* (1956, figure 14). It is a cluster of earthly material affixed to a wood panel. The color is a mixture between concrete grey and light caramel brown with no focal center. Instead of toying with automatic gestures and the surrealist notion that the unconscious is the principal element generating creation, Tàpies avoided bright colors in search for a more organic visual experience, combined with an alluring texture, as his main vehicle for expression in this work.

²¹ Ibid., 4.
²² Catoir, *Conversations with Antoni Tàpies*, 95.



Figure 14- Antoni Tàpies, *Terra i pintura*, 1956

The Matter Paintings, which exhibit the style that Tàpies decided to stick to for the remainder of his long artistic career, are unmistakably tied to the life and times of their maker. Antoni Tàpies i Puig was born on December 13, 1923 in an apartment on Carrer Canuda in Barcelona. In 1966 he wrote *A Personal Memoir: Fragments for an Autobiography*, although the original version (in Catalan) was not published until 1977. In this autobiographic account he recalled a memory from his youth that is tied to a specific image:

From the day after the proclamation of the Republic [April 14, 1931] I hold the persistent vision of the garden of a villa facing our house with a large object covered with sheets and tied with ropes. They told me that the inhabitants of that house were supporters of the monarchy and had recently placed on their garden fountain the royal coat of arms, which they now hurried to hide under those sheets so the Republican sympathizers wouldn't break and destroy it. I thought those monarchists were members of a sinister sect, and the image of that cabalistic object now bundled like a kind of gigantic package has remained with me as the symbol of something forbidden and wicked.²³

At the age of seven, it is implausible that Tàpies understood, at the time, the magnitude or complexity of the sociopolitical changes that occurred during his youth. In a single decade he lived through the fall of General Miguel Primo de Rivera's dictatorship (1923-1930), the termination of the monarchy, the declaration of the Second Spanish Republic and its short-lived

²³ Tàpies, *Complete Writings Volume I. A Personal Memoir: Fragments for an Autobiography*, 75.

democratic government (1931-1939), the break out of a long and bloody civil war and Francisco Franco's subsequent dictatorial rule (1936-1975). Before Tàpies had turned sixteen-years-old, the Republic had fallen to rebel leader Francisco Franco and his military regime, marking the end of the war on April 1, 1939. The young artist's adolescence straddled a devastating national conflict and the early years of what would become a long dictatorship. Both had a great impact on Tàpies's attitude towards politics and his homeland.

In *A Personal Memoir*, he also expressed his despise for the Franco, in addition to the numerous spaces and places crippled due to the persecution of the use of his native language:

Destruction and death brought on by war, hundreds of thousands of executions, people left to die in prison.... Even though it was not publicized, we knew that Franco had said that, if necessary, he would order the death of Spain. For us especially that genocide was unleashed not only onto our political rights, but upon all that was Catalan. Our language was totally forbidden in the press, in official acts, on the radio, on advertisements and public signs, even in church. The regime went so far as to forbid Catalan in private correspondence. All our cultural institutions were eliminated, our songs banned, as were our dances, the names of our squares and streets, our schools, our monuments, theater, giving our children Catalan names, our anthem, our flag....²⁴

The repercussions of war-torn Barcelona and the repressive subjection that followed is not something that is easy to erase from memory. As Michael Richards argued, the end of the war ushered a period "darker still than the conflict itself," as violence continued long after the final battle.²⁵ The new regime's use of repressive force was directed at civilians, who suffered the worst of the violence, while guerrilla fighters sought refuge in rural towns and villages.²⁶ In 1940s Spain, hunger and poverty were prolific, conditions that were magnified by a post-war economic repression. While Tàpies's family did not experience economic hardship, it is a past that remained engrained in his mind, as seen in his writing and in his art. Through art making, Tàpies dedicated his life to combating what the Franco dictatorship effectively undermined, ideological freedom and alternative cultural and national identities.

²⁴ Ibid., 169.

²⁵ Michael Richards, *After the Civil War: Making Memory and Re-making Spain since 1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 99.

²⁶ Ibid., 126. See also: Sebastian Balfour, *Dictatorship, Workers, and the City: Labour in Greater Barcelona since 1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); J.M. Sole i Sabaté, *La represión franquista en Cataluña 1938-1953* (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1985); and José Antonio Vidal Castaño, *La memoria reprimida: Historias orales del maquis* (Valencia: Universidad de Valencia, 2004).

Although Franco's official rhetoric propagated a unified, Catholic Spain, his regime employed regional symbols and traditions as a means of promoting internal and external tourism. As Pablo Giori outlined, "bullfighting, soccer, *la sardana* [a dance], and human towers were used separately by Francoists, the opposition, and Catalan nationalists, depending on the place and time..."²⁷ The "classic" *barretina* was even adopted by Madrid's politicians during the end of the dictatorship.²⁸ This sort of appropriation on behalf of the regime contributed to what Borja de Riquer characterized as a form of government "riddled with contradictions and contrasts." Similarly, Xosé Manoel Núñez Seixas discussed this side of the dictatorship, expressing "Franco's contradictory capacity to promote local and regional identities complementary to the national identity."²⁹

Tàpies recalled that during the first decade of the dictatorship, access to information concerning foreign avant-garde art was limited. "In Spain there was not a word about content, about motivations, about social function, about the politics of art... Here those questions were carefully concealed.... The clichés dictated that art had nothing to do with politics, or religion, or philosophy."³⁰ Meanwhile in the United States, the artists belonging to the New York School experimented with Abstract Expressionism. The Parisian art scene remained split between Surrealist groups and academic schools. In 1948 the international group CoBrA (titled after the cities of Copenhagen, Brussels, and Amsterdam) formed amongst artists and intellectuals with a desire to critique capitalist societies. The visual language of the group took after the styles of Paul Klee and Joan Miró while characterizing abstraction as aseptic and falsely detached.³¹ Less than a decade later CoBrA had dissolved, but the new group Situationist International upheld similar values and strategies to present a biting critique of advanced capitalism and its effect on human relations. Those loyal to the Situationist International saw art and politics as inextricably

²⁷ Pablo Giori, "Castells, sardanes i toros. Les disputes culturals dels nacionalismes durant el franquisme," *Segle XX. Revista Catalana d'història*, 7 (2014: 13-32), 25.

²⁸ *ABC*, March 23, 1974, accessed September 5, 2016,

<http://hemeroteca.abc.es/nav/Navigate.exe/hemeroteca/madrid/abc/1974/04/23/001.html>.

²⁹ Xosé Manoel Núñez Seixas, "La región y lo local en el primer franquismo," *Imaginarios y representaciones de España durante el franquismo* (Madrid: Velázquez, 2014: 127-154), 150. See also: Andrea Geniola "Erudición y particularismo: sobre la oferta 'regional' franquista," VII Encuentro de Investigadores del Franquismo, Santiago de Compostela, 2011.

³⁰ Tàpies, *Complete Writings Volume I. A Personal Memoir: Fragments for an Autobiography*, 169.

³¹ Hal Foster et al., *Arte desde 1900: modernidad antimodernidad posmodernidad* (Madrid: Ediciones Akal, 2006), 391.

linked and sought to denunciate consumer culture.³² While Tàpies was not directly linked to this group of social revolutionaries, his Matter Paintings worked in a similar fashion. They purposefully centered on mundane, undervalued material, lacking flashy objects and colors associated with “spectacle” and advertisements.³³

Even though Tàpies participated in national art exhibitions, such as the Bienales Hispano-Americanas held in the 1950s, exhibiting internationally was fundamental for his career. Tàpies was not part of the group El Paso, formed in 1957 in Madrid with the agenda of reestablishing avant-garde art in Spain, as it had essentially vanished since the onset of the Civil War. Another Spanish group that ran parallel to Tàpies’s career, although he did not share a relationship with, was the Grupo de Cuenca. This circle formed around the artist Fernando Zóbel and his establishment of the Museo de Arte Abstracto Español de Cuenca in 1966. During this period, Tàpies was primarily showing in Catalonia and abroad. He would not begin to seriously expand his gallery exhibitions to the rest of Spain until the late 1970s.

In Franco’s Spain, art was being used as a tool to project a certain image to an international audience. Contemporary art at the Bienales was shown to other countries as a facade, suggesting that Spain was *not* under a fascist regime and that nontraditional artists were *not* labeled “degenerates” and persecuted as they were in Nazi Germany.³⁴ However, art was not seen as a serious means of expression existing beyond the realm of aesthetics. Tàpies wrote an anecdote about Franco’s attitude towards avant-garde artists in Spain between 1951 and 1952:³⁵

I have a photograph showing Franco, surrounded by important people, standing in front of one of my paintings at one of the Bienales Hispano-Americanas [the first, in Madrid between October of 1951 and February of 1952]. At the end of the group, half hidden, covering his face to hide from photographers, stands Llorens Artigas. They are all laughing. According to Llorens, someone, perhaps Alberto del Castillo, was telling Franco: ‘Your excellency, this is the hall of the

³² Ibid., 391-392.

³³ One of the Situationist International’s key theories: Guy Debord, *La société du spectacle* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1967).

³⁴ José Miguel Cabañas Bravo, “La primera Bienal Hispanoamericana de Arte: arte, política y polemica en un certamen internacional de los años cincuenta” (Ph.D. diss., Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 1991), 49.

³⁵ There were three Bienales celebrated between 1951 and 1956 in Madrid, Havana, and Barcelona. Two attempts at a fourth failed and the exhibition was later reinstated in 1963 as *Arte de América y España*. For more on the Bienales Hispano-Americanas and the “contrabiennial” or “anti-bienal” exhibitions created in opposition of the politics of the organization, Franco’s regime, see: Cabañas Bravo, “La primera Bienal Hispanoamericana de Arte....”

revolutionaries.’ And it seems Franco joked: ‘If this is the way they carry out the revolution....’³⁶

Beginning with the Matter Paintings of the 1950s, Tàpies found a style that allowed him to continue to work in Spain without flaunting his anti-Francoist posture.³⁷ His art, albeit often discretely, is closely linked to his political beliefs, as this chapter will further elaborate. As Cirici described, Tàpies’s participation in the Bienales was “thanks to a cryptic system of signs in abstract painting, that censorship couldn’t touch....”³⁸ Remarkably, this style long outlived the dictator, who died on November 20, 1975. Tàpies continued to work in this manner because, even after the death of Franco, it was a way to remind beholders of the importance of values such as freedom and humanism, values that had been robbed from countless citizens after the fall of the Second Republic.

2.2 Consistency in an Era of Instability (1970-1987)

By the 1970s, Tàpies had become the new reference of Catalan visual art, replacing the aging artists of the previous generation including Miró and Dalí. Gimferrer published in 1975 that “the work of Antoni Tàpies is now at a beginning of a future that belongs to it.”³⁹ While the artist began his professional career in the late 1940s and began producing his most recognizable style in the mid 1950s, it took several decades for Tàpies to establish his work in a country suffering the lingering effects of a destructive war and lengthy dictatorship. During and after the transition to democracy, following the death of Franco, Tàpies’s style did not change.⁴⁰ His art continued to work against the conservative cultural policies of the former regime that sought to suffocate

³⁶ Tàpies, *Complete Writings Volume I. A Personal Memoir: Fragments for an Autobiography*, 326.

³⁷ In 1966, Tàpies attended in the clandestine anti-Francoist meeting, La Caputxinada, in the neighborhood of Barcelona’s Sarrià. Molinero and Ysàs, *La cuestión catalana...*, 24.

³⁸ Cabañas Bravo, “La primera Bienal Hispanoamericana de Arte: arte, política y polemica en un certamen internacional de los años cincuenta,” 45.

³⁹ Pere Gimferrer, *Tàpies and the Catalan Spirit*, 82.

⁴⁰ Some scholars define the end of the transition as occurring in: 1981 after the failed coup, 1982 after the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) won general elections, or 1986 after Spain became a member of the European Economic Community; however here I discuss the transition not as a historical frame of reference but a process, the transition to a democratic state which took place between November 20, 1975 and December 6, 1978.



Figure 15- Antoni Tàpies, *Creu ocre i blanc sobre marró*, 1971 (left)

Figure 16- Antoni Tàpies, *Blanc amb deus creus*, 1976 (center)

Figure 17- Antoni Tàpies, *Gran pintura amb X i +*, 1981 (right)

alternative national identities under the guise of national unity.⁴¹ During and after the transition to democracy in Spain, Tàpies continued to reinvent his oeuvre, albeit in his style of the past.

For example, three works that are analogous in terms of style yet created during disparate political circumstances are: *Creu ocre i blanc sobre marró* (1971, figure 15), *Blanco amb deus creus* (1976, figure 16), and *Gran pintura amb X i +* (1981, figure 17). Tàpies created the first during the end of the Franco dictatorship, the same year as the Assemblea de Catalunya met to consolidate a resistance movement that would work towards establishing a democratic Spain. He made the second painting during the transition, one year after the dictator's death. During this year, the government was in a fragile state as the newly appointed Prime Minister Adolfo Suárez began to set in motion the Law for Political Reform. This legislation was approved by the Francoist Cortes in 1976 and also by popular referendum in 1977, enabling Suárez to work towards establishing a parliamentary democracy in Spain. The third picture dates from three years after the ratification of the 1978 Spanish Constitution. At this time, Catalonia was officially an Autonomous Community and the resilience of Madrid's new democratic government was proved after a failed coup d'état on February 23, 1981. At the age of 55, this became the first

⁴¹ For more on the “Chamelion-like” nature of Spanish nationalism since the new democracy see: Balfour and Quiroga, *The Reinvention of Spain*.

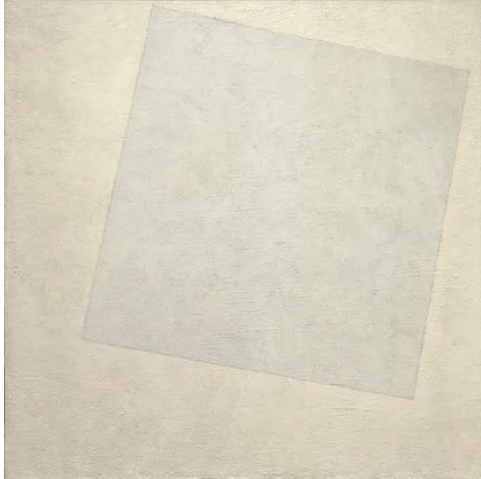
national democracy in which Tàpies could participate. However, this major change is *not* reflected in the style of his art.

Creu ocre i blanc sobre marró includes a wonky, white square and cross floating in the bottom third of a dark brown canvas. The large white cross, or “+” symbol, has a second pair of perpendicular lines scratched into the center, creating a second, darker and equally hasty looking cross. The white square has the initials of Tàpies’s three children (Antoni, Clara, and Miquel) scraped over the surface of the paint. Nothing in the canvas is grounded; both the square and large cross exist in an unnatural, indecipherable space. Similarly, *Blanco amb deus creus* consists of a sloppy layer of white paint, partially dripping down towards the bottom of the rectangular base. Four short, thin, black lines radiate from each corner, slicing them around 45 degrees. Equally spaced between these lines at the top, arranged like the title of a book, are two pairs of perpendicular lines. Although Tàpies’s self-proclaimed allergy to color creates a great divide between his art and that of Miró’s, these crosses and his play on perspective in this painting is remarkably similar to the elder artist’s experimentations like *Cap de pagès català* (figures 2 and 3).⁴² Not only did Tàpies appropriate the slender, stark cross-shaped markings of Miró, in *Creu ocre i blanc sobre marró* and *Blanco amb deus creus* he was also toying with the depth of the picture, just like Miró. The sign refuses to allow the viewer to read into the depth of the canvas in the traditional sense. There is no conventional perspective, rather, we are provided with fragments of hovering horizons that pull our eyes from one side to the other like a seesaw. The segments of orthogonal lines pragmatically placed in each corner of *Blanco amb deus creus* create the ghost of a focal point in the center, where the lines would converge if they were to continue towards infinity. The depth of the canvas is simultaneously never-ending, and flat like the cover of a book, depending on how the viewer imagines those four seemingly unimportant lines.

Beyond Miró, both *Creu ocre i blanc sobre marró* and *Blanco amb deus creus* resonate with Kazimir Malevich’s 1918 *Suprematist Composition: White on White* (figure 18). The color white, for Malevich, was paired with the idea of infinity, and his theory on art that dealt with “pure” feelings accessible through nonobjective art.⁴³ *Suprematist Composition* is a somber yet hopeful canvas, created as the First World War came to an end. Relatedly, *Creu ocre i blanc*

⁴² Tàpies stated in an interview with Catoir, “I think that advertising has given us a surfeit of colour. I’m positively allergic to colour.” Catoir, *Conversations with Antoni Tàpies*, 95.

⁴³ Kasimir Malevich, “Suprematism,” *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 341.



**Figure 18- Kazimir Malevich, Suprematist
Composition: White on White, 1918**

sobre marró includes an imperfect, white square like that of Malevich, and *Blanco amb deus creus* is an optimistic image of floating forms in a calm sea of white.

Gran pintura amb X i + also echoes both Miró and Malevich's artworks. Tàpies's canvas is not white but the soft, golden color is emotive, while the pair of perpendicular lines (Miró's Catalan peasants) are designated to the two upper corners. His continual use of broad color fields and non-objective forms was resolute before, during, and after the transition to democracy.

Objects in the materials world, however, were not always absent from Tàpies's compositions. In fact, he often incorporated everyday, worn, tattered, or dirty items into his creations. Comparing another set of artworks, made under distinct historical conditions in Spain, confirms Tàpies's unwavering stylistic commitment despite the immense changes of the 1970s and 1980s. *Tela i tisores* (1970, figure 19) displays a pair of scissors affixed in the middle of a light colored cloth or sheet. The scissors are closed and pointing downward, towards the painted outline of a large foot amidst stray splatters of paint. The weight of the scissors pulls on the material, creating wrinkles stemming from the two upper corners that lead the eyes towards the scissors. Meaning, in this artwork, is unfixed. There is no single interpretation that this work can uphold based purely on visual evidence. However, it does show beholders that the boundaries of art are not limited to the conventional conception of what is beautiful or attractive. It is the antithesis of the seductiveness of an oil painting. Tàpies believed that art ought to instigate thought and reflection. *Tela i tisores* is purposefully ambiguous yet uncannily familiar.

In a later work, Tàpies used an open pair of scissors as a stencil to recreate the axis of a vertical and horizontal line for the poster announcing the 1977 exhibition *ACC I Art Català Contemporani: Brossa, Miró, Tàpies* at the Museu de Granollers (figure 20). The negative space left when he removed the scissors is the color of a cardboard box, and since it is significantly lighter than the matte black that surrounds it, the figure (or lack thereof) is pushed to the foreground. A third work that also includes scissors does not depart from his previously established style; *Empremta de tisores* (1987, figure 21) likewise employs a pair of open scissors,



Figure 19- Antoni Tàpies, *Tela i tisores*, 1970 (left)

Figure 20- Antoni Tàpies, Poster for *ACC 1 Art Català Contemporani: Brossa, Miró, Tàpies*, 1977 (center)

Figure 21- Antoni Tàpies, *Empremta de tisores*, 1987 (right)

this time angled in the form of an “X” imprinted in white on a gray background with straight lines radiating from each corner. The lines, formed from scratching through the surface of wet paint, do not converge at a center point; instead, the top two create a “V” shape, which is linked with a short, vertical line to an inverted “V” below. Several nonsensical signs or letters are scratched through a white label at the top, revealing a layer of light orange below. The canvas works on a sentimental as opposed to a symbolical level through its texture, symmetry, and style.

Tàpies struck a balance between non-objective and familiarity throughout his career. What unifies these three works is the aura in which the artist created via style. In a newspaper article titled “Tàpies para escépticos” [Tàpies for Skeptics], Antonio Lucas pointed out that when looking at the artist’s work, “you have to get rid of the analytic gaze, understand that we are before an open field of colliding emotions... it is a question of suggestion, not analysis.”⁴⁴ Throughout his long career, Tàpies worked to refine this style, a style that does not seek to solve anything yet suggest everything.

⁴⁴ Luis Alemany, “Tàpies para escépticos,” *El Mundo*, February 7, 2012, <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2012/02/07/cultura/1328613795.html>.

The extraordinary thing about Tàpies's work is the stability of his art over time. Separate works that were created under vastly different situations are unified through the sensation that they transmit. While each individual canvas may not yield easily to analysis, the luxury of hindsight allows for an analytical approach to understanding Tàpies's pictures. There is no major stylistic change amongst artworks that he created during the final five years of the Franco regime, the transition, and after the signing of the 1978 Constitution. However, the 1971 Assembla de Catalunya, ensuing uncertainty after Franco's death, the first democratic elections in 41 years, and the drafting of a new Spanish Magna Charta were all events that could have prompted an alteration of artistic practices.

The Assembla de Catalunya was formed in opposition to Franco's regime, seeking a new democratic system, amnesty for those arrested during the dictatorship, and an autonomous status for Catalonia, as part of the Spanish State. Approximately 300 people gathered in Barcelona to celebrate the act composed of members from clandestine political parties, cultural associations, syndicates, and individuals. The group did not seek separation from the State but major political reforms.⁴⁵ Tàpies made a painting memorializing the event, *7 de novembre* (1971), which now hangs in the Palau del Parlament de Catalunya. Similar movements against the regime increased in popularity in the early 1970s throughout Spain. Sebastian Balfour explained that "Barcelona became the capital of the opposition to the dictatorship" during these years.⁴⁶ The PSUC had turned into what Carme Molinero and Pere Ysàs characterized as "the primary political anti-Francoist formation," although other groups throughout Spain also mobilized in acts of resistance. The Partido Comunista de España (PCE) and Madrid's university student riots held some of the most active initiatives before the dictator's death in November 1975.⁴⁷ Activism in the form of student protests also established strongholds in Valencia, Zaragoza, and

⁴⁵See also: Montserrat Guibernau, *Per un catalanisme cosmopolita* (Barcelona: Angle, 2009), 35-36; José Luis de la Granja Sáinz, Justo G. Beramendi, and Pere Anguera, *La España de los nacionalismos y las autonomías* (Madrid: Síntesis, 2001); and Josep Maria Sòria, "Naixement i mort de l'Assembla de Catalunya," *La Vanguardia*, November 6, 2011.

⁴⁶ Balfour, *Dictatorship, Workers, and the City...*, 191.

⁴⁷ Fernando Nistal González, *El papel del Partido Comunista en la Transición* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales, 2015), 81 and Richards, *After the Civil War*, 254. See also: Carme Molinero, (coord.), *La Transición treinta años después* (Barcelona: Península, 2006), 31-40; Molinero and Ysàs, *La cuestión catalana, 147-152*; and Nicolás Sartorius and Alberto Sabio Alcutén, *El final de la dictadura: la conquista de la democracia en España: noviembre de 1975- junio de 1977* (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 2007), 145-195.

Bilbao.⁴⁸ Finally, labor movements also played a role in the push towards a new political system in Spain.⁴⁹

After Arias Navarro failed to transform the nation into a democracy that would not wholly upset Franco's followers, King Juan Carlos I appointed Adolfo Suárez as Prime Minister of Spain on July 3, 1976. The following year, Suárez would continue to lead Spain, as the first democratically elected Prime Minister since the Spanish Civil War. He made the decision to legalize the PCE on April 9, 1977, a few months after members of an ultra-right, anti-Communist had group killed five lawyers in the center of Madrid in an act of terror.

In the final days of 1978, Spain held a referendum concerning the adoption of the new Constitution. At the time, more than 91% of voters were in favor of the law that would establish a constitutional monarchy in the Kingdom of Spain. On December 18, 1979, Catalonia and the Basque Country were granted the status of Autonomous Communities. The newly ratified Constitution allowed certain privileges to these regions, along with Galicia, as historical nationalities (*nacionalidades históricas*), which enabled their swift transition to becoming Spain's first three Autonomous Communities. The failure of an attempted military coup in February 1981 in the Congress of Deputies demonstrated the resilience of the nascent government, although numerous scholars have characterized the early years of the new democracy as 'fraudulent' and a perpetuation of Francoism.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, King Juan Carlos I made a nationally televised speech in the aftermath of the failed coup, publicizing his support for the strength of the actual legal system. Later that year, the creation of further autonomic pacts paved the way for future transfers of power. Spain would go on to create seventeen regional governments corresponding to its autonomous communities that had been outlined during the transition.⁵¹

Surprisingly, Tàpies did not seem to have a pictorial response to such stimuli, his images remained the same. His works throughout the 1970s and 1980s radiate a resolute energy that is as if the constantly changing nature of the world around him had been suspended or locked in time. His treatment of a pair of crossed lines or a pair of old scissors (that create the same shape when

⁴⁸ Sartorius and Sabio Alcutén, *El final de la dictadura*, 156.

⁴⁹ Borja de Riquer, "Social and Economic Change in a Climate of Political Immobilism," *Spanish Cultural Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 269.

⁵⁰ Gonzalo Pasamar, "¿Cómo nos han contado la Transición? Política, memoria e historiografía (1978-1996)," *Ayer* 99 (2015): 225-249. 249; 229.

⁵¹ Richards, *After the Civil War*.

open) has always been the same. He was not preoccupied with things, rather, he was interested in how things are able to trigger sentiments or memories and provoke ideas. The logic behind Tàpies's commitment to his unique aesthetic (or antiaesthetic) style was shared between the realm of politics and that of modern art. Two realms that are *not* antithetical, as I will later elaborate.

In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* James Scott addressed the dynamics of power relations, public actions and private, or hidden, transcripts. "Taking a long historical view, one sees that the luxury of relatively safe, open political opposition is both rare and recent."⁵² Forms of disguised resistance are more common, yet not so easy to detect. Scott deemed this type of opposition "infrapolitics" because it inhabits an intermediary space between the whispered ideas shared amongst friends and the bold performances of public protest or denunciations, for example, the act of spreading rumors, telling folktales, squatting, sabotaging crops, etc. Infrapolitical actions are not direct, outward proclamations; they take the form of veiled and often anonymous resistance in order to protect the agents from potentially violent reactions. If and when subordinate groups seize an opportunity to act publically, Scott emphasized the importance of the roles that hidden transcripts and disguised resistance play beneath the surface.⁵³ In other words, while action tends to enjoy the limelight, bold demonstrations against authority are often the culmination of a web of forces that would otherwise remain unnoticed. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* illustrated the error in solely examining breakthrough moments, "it is to focus on the visible coastline of politics and miss the continent that lies beyond."⁵⁴ In analyzing change or lack thereof, it is imperative to consider the landmass from which the shore has been made.⁵⁵

In considering the work of Tàpies through the lens of Scott, his objectives as an artist and a citizen become sharper. As early as the 1950s, Tàpies began to work in a style that was purposefully ambiguous. He was working within Scott's realm of "infrapolitics," his art could be characterized as occupying a space somewhere in-between recognizable protest and secrets shared behind closed doors. His almost entirely abstract canvases from this time are nearly impossible to apprehend based solely on their physical appearance. Instead of depicting ideas,

⁵² Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 99.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 202.

they show sensations, often somber, grim sensations. This style stemmed from Tàpies's experiences and his desire to communicate his thoughts visually. Art historian and Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona Professor Maria Lluïsa Borrás stated in *Destino* that his works “are not the artistic creations that we used to refer to, but an endeavor to communicate.” At the time, Borrás was working as Miró's secretary; she assisted in the early formation of the artist's foundation and later collaborated on an unedited documentary about Tàpies in 1981. She concluded the *Destino* article with an explanation that contemporary culture and art are present, regardless if one sees it or not, and no “terrestrial power” can change that fact.⁵⁶

For example, in 1974 Tàpies created a series of works in honor of Salvador Puig Antich, an anarchist and active member of the Iberian Liberation Movement who was sentenced to death by the Franco regime after a skirmish with the *Guardia Civil*. Puig Antich was 25 years old when he was found guilty of shooting a civil guard without any solid evidence. Despite pleas for clemency on behalf of the Pope and foreign ambassadors, the young man was strangled to death with a garrote.⁵⁷ Although Puig Antich was an anarchist, the PCE used the event, along with the execution of Heinz Chez, as a motive to create propaganda against the regime and others sought to keep Puig Antich's memory alive, converting him into a sort of national martyr.⁵⁸

Without the title *A la memòria de Salvador Puig Antich*, Tàpies's canvas seems to have little to do with this issue (figure 22). A small, colorful sample of paints is glued above a black sweater neatly folded into a right angle. Several streams of gray paint drip from the sleeve of the upside-down sweater. The neckline is frayed, with a few strands of fabric recalling the method in which Puig Antich was killed. This atypical memorial is about what is missing (the body of the deceased) and its ascension to another, more colorful, realm. The formal characteristics of this example do not point directly to any particular political position. The title is what attaches its meaning: the remembrance of man sentenced to an inhumane death. Without the title, the work is entirely unclear. For this reason, the work fits into Scott's infrapolitical realm; the style of *A la*

⁵⁶ Maria Lluïsa Borrás, “Antoni Tàpies o una nueva cultura,” *Destino* (June 12, 1971), 60.

⁵⁷ Javier Angulo, “Puig Antich, caso reabierto,” *El País*, September 3, 2006, http://elpais.com/diario/2006/09/03/eps/1157264817_850215.html and Richards, *After the Civil War*, 254. See also: Pau Casanellas, *Morir matando: El franquismo ante la práctica armada, 1968-1977* (Madrid: Catarata, 2014).

⁵⁸ Nistal González, *El papel del Partido Comunista en la Transición*, 93. Examples seeking to perpetuate the memory of Puig Antich: Francesc Escribano, *Compte enrere: la història de Salvador Puig Antich* (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 2001); Jordi Panyella, *Salvador Puig Antich, caso abierto* (Barcelona: Lectio, 2015); *Dies de transició Salvador Puig Antich: dotze hores de vida: l'execució de Puig Antich* (Televisió de Catalunya and Vernal Media, 2006), documentary film.

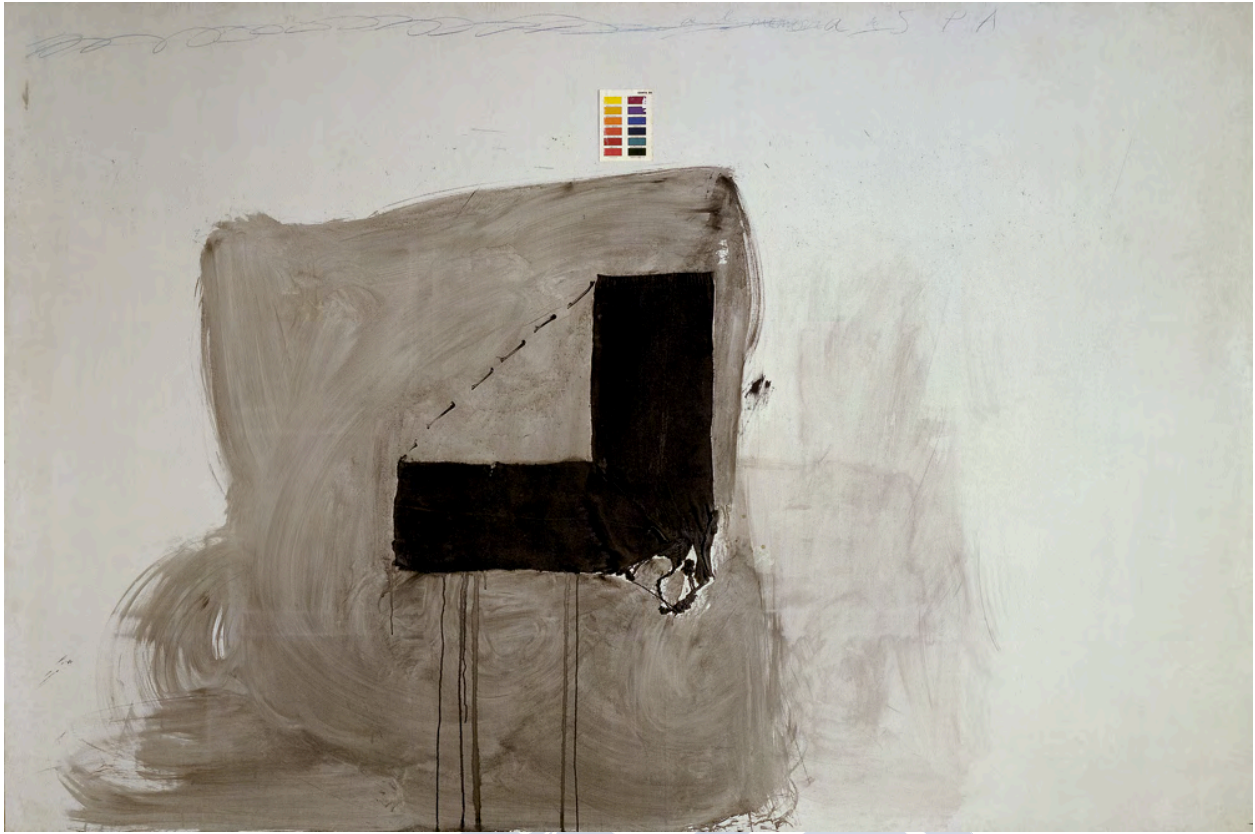


Figure 22- Antoni Tàpies, *A la memòria de Salvador Puig Antich*, 1974

memòria de Salvador Puig Antich is like a visual version of a code used to subvert those in positions of power.

Another artwork that is both stylistically ambiguous yet anti-Francoist, albeit created after the dictator's death, is *11 de setembre* (1977, figure 23). Franco had named Prince Juan Carlos I as his successor and after the dictator died, Juan Carlos took on the title King of Spain. The new king, after trying to perpetuate the dictatorial regime for nearly six months, began a process that would transform the Francoist government into a democratic monarchy.⁵⁹ During this process, Juan Carlos was cautious not to upset a range of different groups, most importantly the military. After the appointment of a provisional government led by Adolfo Suárez in 1976,

⁵⁹ Richards, *After the Civil War*, 264. See also: Sartorius and Sabio Alcutén, *El final de la dictadura*.

delegates elected in June of the following year would begin to draft the Spanish Constitution that would create a type of federal system. On September 11, 1977 Barcelona hosted the largest demonstration in post-war Europe, to show support for the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia that would become law two years later.⁶⁰

Tàpies's picture titled after that particular day is blood red, with various forms painted over each other. At the bottom is a small page of a calendar with the date September 11 typed in bold ink. The Catalan holiday (referred to as the Diada) dates to the late nineteenth century and has been celebrated in remembrance of the events of 1714, when the Bourbon King Filipe V defeated Barcelona's troops in defense of the Hapsburg dynasty's claim to the throne.⁶¹ Franco had banned the celebration of the holiday and, not surprisingly, the day became even more important for Catalan citizens to acknowledge during and after the transition to democracy. Without the small scrap of paper with the calendar date, the image is an accumulation of layered markings without any dominating focal point. Attaching that little paper at the bottom entirely changes the picture's implication: what would have been an abstract collection of signs turned into a statement concerning the importance of that particular date and year. While the title of Tàpies's image is clear, he did not express what one should do on September 11th or why that day is worth remembering or celebrating. The canvas also lies in Scott's infrapolitical zone because of the tension that exists between the clarity of the title and the opacity of the picture.

A post-transition example of this same style at work, another artwork that can be situated in Scott's infrapolitical realm, is *Efecte de drap* (1980, figure 24). This mixed media composition is exactly what the title claims, the effect of cloth. The various values of light and dark in this picture are formed from the weight of the fabric, pinned up at the two upper corners. Heavy, black letters are scribbled in a straight line across the bottom, ending with the number eight. Upon first glance the image seems nonsensical, the letters do not seem to spell any particular word and the cloth is an ordinary, banal material. However, considering this work together with the history of the artist's experience in pre-war Barcelona, the image becomes more potent.

⁶⁰ Daniele Conversi, "The Smooth Transition: Spain's 1978 Constitution and the Nationalities Question" (*National Identities*, V.4 No. 3, 2002), 226-227; Conversi goes on to discuss how the Transition took on a "smoother process" than other plausible strategies. This later affected how nationalist groups have historically sought recognition as opposed to complete separation. See also: Carme Molinero and Pere Ysas, *La cuesti3n catalana. Catalu3na en la transici3n espa3ola* (Barcelona: Cr3tica, 2014).

⁶¹ David Mart3nez Fiol, "La construcci3n m3tica del 'onze de setembre' en la cultura pol3tica del catalanisme durante el siglo XX," *Historia y Pol3tica* 14, 221, 2005.



Figure 23- Antoni Tàpies, *11 de setembre*, 1977 (left)



Figure 24- Antoni Tàpies, *Efecte de drap*, 1980 (right)

Tàpies's remembrance of his neighbor's garden fountain with monarchist symbols cloaked in sheets during the Second Republic stuck in his mind as a "symbol of something forbidden and wicked."⁶² *Efecte de drap* is not about the picture itself; it is about what is *behind* the image, what the material is covering up. While Tàpies's rendition is not quite a *tromp l'oeil* depiction of fabric, it does invite the curious viewer to touch. This is a trope that artists from Diego Velázquez to Paul Cézanne employed, activating the sense of touch via masterly painted fabrics. *Efecte de drap* is a sensuous image that is politically charged yet ambiguous. It leaves us to wonder both what the cloth feels like and, equally importantly, what it is concealing.

It is possible that this canvas is a metaphor for the transition itself. With a backdrop of the Spanish left's disillusion with the pace of political reforms and the lack of rupture from the Francoist politics of the past, *Efecte de drap* could visualize a parallel process. Tàpies may have wanted to draw attention to the act of covering up, as opposed to eliminating, an object. This would fit into the context of the *desencanto* [disenchantment], a profound pessimism that clashed with the optimism of the *consenso* [consensus] surrounding the creation of the new Spanish Constitution. From 1977 to 1982 many of those who participated in acts of resistance during the early 1970s felt deeply dissatisfied with the processes of the recent political reforms led by

⁶² Tàpies, *Complete Writings Volume I. A Personal Memoir: Fragments for an Autobiography*, 75.

political elites.⁶³ *Efecte de drap* could have provoked viewers in 1981 to think about camouflaging or masking things so that they are not able to be seen.

A la memòria de Salvador Puig Antich, 11 de setembre, and *Efecte de drap* are potent representations that contain political implications, cleverly engaged with avant-garde artistic trends. The first was made in response to Francoist politics the year before the dictator died. The second dealt with a Catalan celebration, which the former regime had banned. Finally, the third has a personal link to Tàpies's childhood memory and hidden symbols that he knew to be dangerous. Despite major political reforms that were made in Spain during the late 1970s, Tàpies continued to create compositions in his style of the past. Just because the dictator had passed away, did not mean that his politics automatically disappeared. Tàpies was not simply against Franco; he was against the dictator's unjust actions and beliefs. By the 1980s, the artist no longer

needed to fight against Franco but those who sought to perpetuate Francoism during and after the transition to democracy.⁶⁴

Tàpies created several artworks that are much less ambiguous in terms of ideological and political content. These works include subject matter that is more direct, however they maintain a stylistic similarity with the rest of his art since the mid 1950s. For example, his 1971 *L'esperit català* (figure 6) and 1976 poster for the Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya (PSUC) (figure 25) both combine words within each picture to signify meaning. The former includes the Catalan word for liberty scratched in the upper portion and below is the phrase long live Catalonia. The image is chaotic with a number of other words etched into the surface that is spattered with bloody handprints. The ladder includes thin



Figure 25- Antoni Tàpies, *PSUC: per Catalunya, la Democràcia i el Socialisme*, 1976

⁶³ Giulia Quaggio, *La cultura en transición: reconciliación y política cultural en España, 1976-1986* (Madrid: Alianza, 2014), 190-195.

⁶⁴ See: Pasamar's historiographical essay "¿Cómo nos han contado la Transición?..." for Francoism in the nascent democracy, 227-231.

black, messy handwriting with a number of unlinked words and phrases such as “Catalunya = Llibertat” and “XL aniversari.” The lower portion of the poster contains the title in small text, *PSUC: per Catalunya, la Democràcia i el Socialisme*. This artwork demonstrates Tàpies’s support for the party, which planned to celebrate its 40th anniversary in 1976, but both the Spanish and French governments prohibited the celebration. As a response, 160 intellectuals and artists publically displayed their respect for the Catalan communists who had been imprisoned, forced into exile, or given their lives during and after the Civil War. It was both a celebration of PSUC’s anniversary and a demonstration signaling that there would not be a democratic government in Catalonia or Spain without the political participation of a future, legal, communist party. Tàpies was one of the artists that signed his name in support of the PSUC on this day.⁶⁵ Four years later, PSUC became the third leading power in the first elections of the Catalan Parliament since the end of the Civil War. *L’esperit català* and the poster use the colors of the Catalan flag; they both have a golden yellow background with four red, vertical stripes signaling the *senyera*. The use of the word liberty in each work is significant in its reference to contemporaneous events. In 1971 the slogan “liberty, amnesty, and a statue of autonomy” was developed in the Assemblea de Catalunya. In 1976 the phrase was used in demonstrations as way of communicating citizens’ desires for the establishment of a new, democratic government in Spain. However, the party’s allure for Tàpies was not constrained strictly to the party’s political objectives. Tàpies shared the PSUC’s idea that Catalonia was a community “culturally and politically differentiated [from Spain] since the Middle Ages.”⁶⁶

Tàpies was a Catalan nationalist and desperately wanted democracy in Spain. He often communicated this via his works of art. Additional examples that include unmasked political content include posters Tàpies made for: an event celebrating popular Catalan songs, the denunciation of capital punishment in Spain, the Liberty March in 1976, and the Congress of Catalan Culture of 1977. The primary objective of the previous year’s Congress of Catalan Culture was to establish an initiative for linguistic and cultural “normality,” which participants felt “was essential to the full recovery of Catalonia’s national identity.”⁶⁷ Through his already established style, and the inclusion of punctuated words and phrases, Tàpies made concrete

⁶⁵ Carme Molinero and Pere Ysàs, *Els anys del PSUC: el partit de l’antifranquisme (1956-1981)* (Barcelona: L’Avenç, 2010), 227.

⁶⁶ Molinero and Ysàs, *La qüestió catalana*, 220. See also: Molinero and Ysàs, *Els anys del PSUC*, 185.

⁶⁷ Josep-Anton Fernández, “Becoming Normal: cultural production and cultural policy in Catalonia,” *Spanish Cultural Studies*, 343.

expressions of his thoughts. At times, these images appear difficult to comprehend, while other examples were more straightforward.

On February 4, 2016 I interviewed the artist's son Toni Tàpies in his gallery in Barcelona. I asked about his father's relationship with the PSUC, because Tàpies had written in 1976 that it is not necessary to enter or exit any political party if you carry it with you.⁶⁸ Toni replied:

My father was never a militant of any political party because he wanted to maintain his liberty of thought, what happened is that during the Franco dictatorship the PSUC in Catalonia was a very active party, very active in the defense of democracy, very active in the defense of social rights, and very active in defending the recuperation of regional autonomy of the Catalan nation as well; my father agreed with all of these causes, and while he never officially joined the party, he did have good friends who participated in the clandestine group during this period. They sometimes asked him if he would make a poster, or donate an artwork to sell to help finance the organization, and he always did it... at that time, the PSUC was like the center of the resistance, in favor of democracy for Catalonia in Spain.⁶⁹

Although Tàpies's was not officially linked to the PSUC, via his artworks, personal relationships, and publications, it is evident that he shared much in common with the group, which was formed in 1936 from four political parties representing the Catalan left. Amongst which was the Partit Comunista de Catalunya (PCC) a regional branch of the PCE, which Fernando Nistal González characterized as the “principle enemy of Franco's regime.”⁷⁰ The communist party organized illegal meetings and orchestrated acts of resistance ranging from student riots to boycotts. The PCE was not legally recognized as a political party until 1977. Juan Andrade discussed how the party was well organized with many militants during the early 1970s, however, shortly after the PCE was legalized in Spain, it suffered an “internal crisis” for various reasons.⁷¹

On June 13, 1976, the same year that he made the PSUC poster, Tàpies published an article in *Avui* that demonstrated his feelings towards art and contemporary political life, “...it is

⁶⁸ Antoni Tàpies, *La realidad como arte: por un arte moderno y progresista* (Murcia: Comisión de Cultura del Colegio Oficial de Aparejadores y Arquitectos Técnicos, 1989), 84.

⁶⁹ Interview with Toni Tàpies, February 4, 2016.

⁷⁰ Nistal González, *El papel del Partido Comunista en la Transición*, 81. See also: Juan Andrade, *El PCE y el PSOE en (la) transición. La evolución ideológica de la izquierda durante el proceso de cambio político* (Madrid: Siglo XXI de España, 2012); Ferran Gallego, *El mito de la transición: la crisis del franquismo y los orígenes de la democracia (1973-1977)* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2008); and Molinero and Ysàs, *Els anys del PSUC*.

⁷¹ Andrade, *El PCE y el PSOE en (la) transición*, 379. See also: Molinero, *La Transición treinta años después*, 91-93.

not simply the way of speaking, the technique of making or communicating (although these also count) but, above all, is the way of being and the way of thinking.”⁷² Even though not all of his artworks demonstrate such direct words or imagery like that of *L’esperit català* and his PSUC poster, Toni Tàpies confirmed that his father often found ways of expressing himself through his paintings.

If we are to read the consistency of Tàpies’s style as unmarried to political changes in Spain then we are to miss the point. Beginning in the mid 1950s, the artist created a trademark style and stuck to it throughout the transition to democracy partially *because of* changing political circumstances. In 1976 Tàpies published another article in *Avui* describing that once an artist develops their own form of creation it is not a reason to settle; he stated, “when an artist finds his or her voice, it is to execute it with continuity, to deploy it and extend it to everyone, it needs to be like the constant guard, an always attentive and durable symbol, as useful in the conquest of the conscience and of liberty.”⁷³ It was not a self-imposed rule that his works must look alike, but that they ought to be connected, they ought to embody moral and liberal values, and they ought to be like resilient representations of those principles. He achieved this via style. Another article in *Avui* dating from 1977 discussed the difference between an “authentic cultural life,” which was repressed under Francoism, and the “parody of ‘culture’” which involves the limitation of mobilization.⁷⁴ In other words, Tàpies was advocating for the support and livelihood of “authentic” culture, which involves social and political engagement in contrast to culture that unconditionally accepts the status quo. Tàpies thought of Miró as a “precious example” who demonstrated the roles in which art and the artist could play in the development of social life.⁷⁵ For this reason, he admired both the work and commitment of Miró.

The creation of the 1978 Constitution ushered a new age for Spain, but it did not erase or undo memories from the past. This is evident in the Tàpies’s stylistic vow to his former compositions. He wanted his work to be in defense of human rights, liberty, and peace because those were the values he sought to uphold. However, this sort of art does not always stand alone. It is nearly impossible to unpack one of Tàpies’s pictures without reading his written statements, investigating titles, or situating it in a greater historical context. His art is dependent upon

⁷² Tàpies, *La realidad como arte...*, 82.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 265.

extraneous information because he created a style that does not easily yield to immediate understanding based solely on visual evidence.

Nevertheless, the new democracy in Spain did in fact impact the artist and his work. What it did was cause him to cement his style, which was created to defend his political beliefs “in favor of humanism, democracy and freedom...”⁷⁶ During the middle of his artistic career, Tàpies maintained tremendously consistent in terms of style, which he later continued to reproduce throughout the remainder of his life. In discussing this topic with Toni Tàpies, he confirmed my analysis. Tàpies’s works do not look exactly the same, but their style is absolutely continuous. Toni Tàpies emphasized that in addition to his father’s stylistic stability, he also had profound “social and political convictions that he always defended from the beginning to the end, and I think that you can see that throughout his entire oeuvre.”⁷⁷

2.3 Concluding Remarks

Much of Tàpies’s art is indirectly political. The visual evidence he has given to us is not always explicit, but extraneous information allows for a greater understanding of what he wanted to achieve as an artist and as a citizen. The style that Tàpies created and replicated over the course of decades is the product of a particular moment in time and a response to both international trends in artistic practices and national politics. As is true for all artists, Tàpies’s personal and sociopolitical circumstances shaped the ways in which he sought to communicate his own visual language. Memories from the past and desires for the future are components that have maintained a coherent presence in his oeuvre.

This chapter has shown how a single artist developed his career under the Franco dictatorship. Even after the transition to a democratic Spanish government, Tàpies kept working in a comparable manner. Although state and local power systems dramatically changed with the ratification of the 1978 Constitution, that shift was not reflected in Tàpies’s art. However, his stylistic consistency was related to the changing sociopolitical context in Spain. First, it was a style that worked for him within the international art world, one that he pioneered, which

⁷⁶ Antoni Tàpies, *Tàpies In Perspective* (Barcelona: Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona and Actar, 2004), 226.

⁷⁷ Interview with Toni Tàpies, February 4, 2016.

previous generations of artists had not fully explored. Second, it was a way for Tàpies to continue to assert his position against political oppression, in favor of freedom and democracy. Tàpies's consistency was a deliberate contrast to the dramatic social and political changes that he experienced growing up in the Catalan capital. In the 1970s and 1980s that personal style became more visible to the public via national and international exhibitions as well as public commissions in and around Barcelona. During this period, Tàpies achieved an iconic status in Catalonia, which the following chapter will explore in greater depth.





3 An Icon in the Making

This chapter addresses both indirect and direct links between politics and art. The objective is to explain Tàpies's increasingly iconic status in Spain during the 1970s and 1980s and how politics affect the production of art and artistic practices. The first section examines when and why Tàpies became one of Catalonia's most distinguished cultural icons. The following section elaborates on an investigation as to how he began to create public works without compromising his already-established style. "An Icon in the Making" concludes with an elucidation of how the realm of the political is an important agent in that of the processes of making and showing art.

3.1 Achieving an Iconic Status

When and why did Tàpies become an icon of culture in Catalonia? Somewhere between Pere Gimferrer's 1975 statement "the work of Antoni Tàpies is now at a beginning of a future that belongs to it"¹ and Jordi Pujol's 1981 speech at the UNESCO headquarters positioning Tàpies amongst some of the most renowned artists of the twentieth century, Tàpies's reputation soared, ultimately leading to important public commissions in the 1980s. The reason for his success had much to do with the space and time in which he developed his career. Tàpies's style was a rejection of *noucentista* aesthetics, bright colors prevalent in commercial advertisement, and geometric abstraction. However, Barcelona was the location in which he became familiar with these modes of representation; it is also where he met Brossa and Miró. When the artistic center of 'Western' society was in a state of transition from Paris to New York City after World War II, Tàpies was holding on to the desire for an avant-garde south of the French capital. His involvement with the group Dau al Set beginning in 1948, and his ensuing nonconformist attitude towards the visual arts is unthinkable in another place or moment in time. The place and time (late 1940s Catalonia) gave shape to Tàpies's pictorial career, for better or for worse. This particular moment was peculiar in that the artist's ambiguous yet political, semi-abstract, unorthodox, and even displeasing compositions were recognized and valued on the international level. It was a moment when geometric abstraction was no longer novel and Abstract

¹ Gimferrer, *Tàpies and the Catalan Spirit*, 82.

Expressionism was taking off in New York City. Many European artists and intellectuals flocked to the United States during and after World War II, but Tàpies held on to the idea that a serious artistic environment could still thrive in Europe. By the mid 1950s, major galleries on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean represented Tàpies.

The Martha Jackson Gallery, in New York City, held a solo exhibition in 1953. Tàpies made his first trip to the United States for the opening, where he signed a contract with the gallery.² Three years later, Galerie Stradler celebrated a one-man show, presenting Tàpies to the Parisian art scene for the first time. By 1975, galleries from a dozen different countries had hosted important solo exhibitions of the artist's work.

Showing in international locations such as New York City, Paris, or Dusseldorf was quite different than exhibiting works within Spain. One reason is that Tàpies's Catalan identity was, in foreign locations, unproblematic. However, in the Iberian Peninsula beholders would have been more aware of tension between the two labels and would have also considered their own identification as similar or different to that of Tàpies. For example, the opening words of Sebastian Gasch's 1971 book on Tàpies (part of the series *Artistas Españoles Contemporáneos*) highlighted the artist's nationalist behaviors. "The painter Antoni Tàpies, just as Joan Miró, always writes his name in Catalan and when speaking accents his last name with great emphasis, according to Catalan grammar..."³ Beyond Spain, particularly in the United States, publications did not highlight these types of nuances. Tàpies's international audience naturally paid less attention to identity politics than his innovation within the art world.

By the end of the Franco dictatorship, he had created a tremendous body of work and continued to display new works around the globe. However, for four consecutive years between 1975 and 1978, Tàpies showed artworks in various Madrid galleries.⁴ This is remarkable considering that he had only exhibited works in Madrid on three prior occasions in 1953, 1966, and 1973.⁵ In Spain's capital, his identity as a Catalan artist was more visible and was naturally pitted against other national and international contemporary artists during this period. Even after the 1970s, Tàpies did not show very often in Madrid. Luis Figuerola-Ferretti commented on this fact during a rare exhibition at the Galería Antonio Machón in 1985: "Informing the public, in

² Catoir, *Conversations with Antoni Tàpies*, 140.

³ Gasch, *Tàpies*, 7.

⁴ Catoir, *Conversations with Antoni Tàpies*, 146-147.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 140-147.

this case *madrileños*, about the current trajectory of an artist of such international relevance like Tàpies, especially because Madrid has not dedicated a rigorous program to show his recent works, is what this gallery offers us today and it is fascinating.”⁶ The infrequency with which Tàpies decided to display works in Madrid is remarkable during the 1970s, he often preferred to show in Catalonia or abroad instead of in Madrid. This certainly stemmed from his love towards his place of birth, but also from his animosity towards Spain’s capital during Francisco Franco’s lifetime. This explains why he would have been more open to showing in Madrid after the dictator’s death in 1975.

Meanwhile, in Barcelona, Tàpies remained active in galleries Maeght and Artema and the Fundació Joan Miró held an important retrospective of the artist’s work. *Antoni Tàpies (Obra 1956-1976)* first opened in Saint-Paul-de-Vence, France between July and September of 1976 at the Fondation Maeght. The exhibition was then sent to Barcelona and shown at the Joan Miró’s foundation between October and December of the same year. The catalogue of the Barcelona exhibition included Tomàs Llorens’s notes on the artist’s paintings in Catalan and in Spanish, biographical information, and a list of previous exhibitions.⁷ Llorens pointed out several important aspects of Tàpies’s oeuvre that would have been relevant for visitors with a background in art history as well as the general public. He demonstrated that instead of asking about *what* the artwork means (or what a particular aspect of the picture stands for), we should ask *how* it produces meaning.⁸ How do the formal elements of the artwork (color, tone, line, form, texture, perspective, fracture) trigger associations, memories, and emotions? Furthermore, he discussed Tàpies’s intentional ambiguity and his balance between unclear elements and random markings, describing him as having a “*voluntad de engaño*” [will to hoax].⁹ Llorens’s notes that accompanied the retrospective *Antoni Tàpies (Obra 1956-1976)* illustrate a remarkable understanding and sensibility towards the artist’s style, previously unseen in critical and art historical texts concerning Tàpies.

This is the future that Gimferrer was referring to. Although Tàpies had already established an international reputation before 1975, this year was a turning point in his career. It was the end of an era and the beginning of Tàpies’s iconic status as a renowned contemporary

⁶ Luis Figuerola-Ferretti, “El arte en Madrid: La pintura actual de Tàpies,” *Goya* 184 (January- February 1985), 261.

⁷ *Antoni Tàpies (Obra 1956-1976)*, (Barcelona: Fundació Miró, 1976).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

artist on the national and international level. Showing works in Madrid engaged a new audience previously unexposed to his recent works. However, support from Madrid never matched that of Barcelona, neither from artistic nor political institutions. Part of the reason for this distinction had to do with the artist's visibility and his dedication to projects based within Catalonia. Another factor is that much of the literature on Tàpies is written in Catalan, which worked to bolster his acclaim as a working artist. In a 1981 speech bridging these two realms at the UNESCO headquarters, Jordi Pujol asserted Tàpies as the youngest in line of several generations of avant-garde artists hailing from Catalonia. His proud proclamation positioned Tàpies as the latest reference of visual art in the region. He was the new Miró. Despite Tàpies's opposition of the conservative government led by the CiU coalition, the Generalitat awarded the artist with the highest recognition of the institution in 1983. The President of the Generalitat presented Tàpies with a gold medal in acknowledgement of his artwork and his hundreds of exhibitions. Aware of the artist's orientation towards leftist politics, Pujol expressed that in one hundred years nobody would remember the name Jordi Pujol but that Antoni Tàpies, through his art, will live on. He did so using an analogy involving the prestige of Pope Julius II verses Michelangelo, with the glory and legacy in favor of the artists.¹⁰

Why did Pujol and CiU appropriate Tàpies as the leader of the Catalan artistic elite? Part of the answer to this question deals with the artist's nationalist discourse, which echoed that of Miró. The Generalitat's support for Tàpies reflected their interest in cultivating a narrative of Catalan cultural nationalism that would link Miró to Tàpies as the most recent Catalan master painters. The question as to how Catalan government institutions figured into Tàpies's success as an artist is addressed in later chapters.

The media also played a significant role to move Tàpies into the upper echelons of contemporary Catalan figures. The caption "Antoni Tàpies, one of the mythical artists of this generation" was published with an interview in *La Vanguardia* in 1981.¹¹ Using the term mythical gives the artist idealized and divine status. The same year, Tàpies created a poster for the 1982 World Cup celebrated in Spain. Various artists representing regions that would host the matches were selected to make an image announcing the event.¹² In Catalonia, Tàpies's image

¹⁰ Joaquín Luna, "Tàpies recibió sin ningún recelo la Medalla de Oro de la Generalitat," *La Vanguardia*, October 7, 1983, 18.

¹¹ *La Vanguardia*, February 5, 1981, 68.

¹² *La Vanguardia*, June 14, 1981, 49.



Figure 26- Antoni Tàpies, Poster for the 1982 World Cup, 1981

included a foot kicking a ball with a cross through the middle in black, sloppy paint on a leftover newspaper with the title “Barcelona 82” above (figure 26). Miró also made a poster for the event, which had no resemblance to that of Tàpies.

The following year, Tàpies had another exhibition at the Fundació Joan Miró. The *Diario de Barcelona* published a photograph of Tàpies holding his granddaughter Teresa in his arms at the show with a pair of his posters hanging in the background on December 23, 1983 (figure 27). Two days later, on Christmas day, Miró passed away. The next day, Tàpies published an article in *La Vanguardia* that praised Miró’s pictorial accomplishments, “a new vision of the world, a way of understanding life, a way of living more fully and justly,

with which goes included, evidently, both our individual and national liberty. And it is not surprising that in this sentiment, Miró was profoundly tied to the need to defend our Catalan spirit, our liberties, our culture...”¹³ National liberty, for Tàpies in this moment, meant protecting the 1979 Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia in the newly established democratic Kingdom of Spain. This statement also demonstrates Tàpies’s commitment to principal elements within the discourse of Catalan nationalism: Catalan “spirit”, liberty, and culture.

In a conversation about this particular publication, Toni Tàpies substantiated the meaning of his father’s words:

I would say that for my father in 1983, just as before, defending Catalonia’s national liberty was, in a way, practically synonymous with defending the democracy in Spain.... For my father, when he defended the recuperation of national rights in Catalonia, it was similar to defending the recuperation of democracy not only in Catalonia but also in Spain....¹⁴

¹³ Antoni Tàpies, *La realidad como arte*, 266.

¹⁴ Interview with Toni Tàpies, February 4, 2016.



Figure 27- Photograph of Antoni Tàpies holding his granddaughter Teresa at the Fundació Joan Miró, *Diario de Barcelona*, Barcelona, December 23, 1983, Arxiu Fotogràfic de Barcelona

Tàpies's sentiments towards Catalonia mirrored those of Miró, although their ways of expressing their feelings were remarkably distinct. Nevertheless, the two artists were often seen as analogous to one another. For example, in Lluís Permanyer's 1986 *Tàpies y la nueva cultura*, he voiced that everything Tàpies touched turned to gold, knowingly echoing the words of the renowned arts promoter Joan Prats who had previously expressed the same concerning Miró.¹⁵

Tàpies's iconic status in Spain augmented in the 1970s and 1980s despite the fact that he was working within the same style he had developed during the previous two

decades. The transition to democracy, Miró's death, and the artist's stylistic peculiarity were all factors in his professional success. Tàpies's decision to consistently show works in Madrid between 1975 and 1978 expanded his audience in an era of great change. Exhibiting art in Spain's capital during this period was not a coincidence, but an ideological maneuver to show in a rapidly transforming city. Hamilton Stapell characterized the changing mood of Madrid during the late 1970s as changed from "a gray and lifeless former home of the dictator to an open and proud place" that would later become "known around the world for its vibrancy."¹⁶ Resonating with Madrid's anti-Franco student movements that advocated for amnesty and a democratic political system, Tàpies's pictures gave shape to parallel ideas concerning his desire for the future of Spain.¹⁷

Additionally, creating works beyond the traditional exhibition piece that reach a large national and international audience, such as the 1982 World Cup poster, helped expand Tàpies's

¹⁵ Permanyer, *Tàpies y la nueva cultura*, 20.

¹⁶ Hamilton Stapell, *Remaking Madrid: Culture, Politics, and Identity after Franco* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 39.

¹⁷ Javiera Errázuriz, "El movimiento estudiantil madrileño durante el curso 1975-1976: auge y agotamiento de un actor fundamental en lucha contra el franquismo," *Ayer* 99 (2015): 216. See also: Stapell, *Remaking Madrid: Culture, Politics, and Identity after Franco*.

exposure and reputation beyond the Iberian Peninsula. At home, the death of Miró in the early 1980s left a void that Tàpies abruptly filled. The number and scale of public commissions that Tàpies undertook in the early 1990s demonstrates the role he played as the foremost living visual artist in Spain at the time. Before his death in 2012, Tàpies had become one of Catalonia's most prestigious artists with his own foundation dedicated to the study and exhibition of modern art. Tàpies, like Miró before him, also aspired to foment the visual arts in Barcelona through the creation of Fundació Antoni Tàpies. Although the two men's artworks had little in common aesthetically, their ideas about the role of art and culture in society were quite similar. Each worked in a different style that was, and continues to be, unique. Style is what first distinguished Tàpies within the international art world and it is also what gave his work continuity throughout his long career.

In 1988, in an exhibition publication from the Ajuntament de Barcelona, *Tàpies els anys 80*, Tàpies was described as “the most illustrious of contemporary Spanish painters.”¹⁸ Using “Spanish” here is remarkable. However, its use, as opposed to the alternative identifying adjective “Catalan,” is not particularly surprising due to the PSC-PSOE's (Partido Socialista Obrero Español) uninterrupted rule of the Ajuntament since the 1979 elections and their promotion of the concept of a dual national identity, both Spanish and Catalan, as being perfectly compatible. Twenty-first century discourse concerning national identity in Catalonia has antagonized the relationship between Spanish and Catalan identities, due to an increase in support for radical Catalan nationalist groups. However, in the 1980s and 1990s, the compatibility of these two concepts was ubiquitous and unproblematic. Individuals could consider themselves as being both Spanish and Catalan without compromise. For many, this has remained true to this day, while others have bought into the idea that these two identifications are mutually exclusive.

Another interesting element of the *Tàpies els anys 80* publication is that it sought to bolster Tàpies's prominence, amplifying the arena in which he was considered “the most illustrious” to the state level. The following sections, and subsequent chapter, will examine the increasing political support that the artist received, which also strengthened his reputation in and beyond Catalonia.

¹⁸ *Tàpies els anys 80*, (Barcelona: Ayuntamiento de Barcelona, 1988), 9.

3.2 Sculpting Catalonia (1983-1989)

In 1983 Tàpies finished major projects for the Ajuntament de Barcelona and the Ajuntament de Sant Boi de Llobregat. These were two of the artist's first major public works in Catalonia and their success led to a number of future large-scale commissions. In 1984 he initiated the long process of creating a foundation in his own name. Tàpies began to physically leave his mark as a contemporary artist in Barcelona in the early 1980s in three dimensions and he did so without straying away from in his already established individual style.



Figure 28- Antoni Tàpies, *Monument Homenatge a Picasso*, 1983

In Barcelona, Tàpies created a controversial sculpture dedicated to Pablo Picasso, a decade after his 1973 death. *Monument Homenatge a Picasso* (figure 28) consists of antique objects and furniture arranged inside a glass cube with gentle streams of water flowing down each side. The pile of encapsulated material was meant to connote familiar objects of comfort, everyday furnishings typical in early twentieth century bourgeoisie homes. The iron rods that slice through the material create a metaphor for Picasso's anticonformist attitude towards both art and life.¹⁹ Tàpies admired both Picasso and Miró, who had passed away months after the sculpture was completed, and he considered each of them as masters in a double sense: for their international artistic merit *and* their regard for social issues. Their works were "inseparable from ethics and politics,"²⁰ just as Tàpies envisioned his own work. On a white cloth hanging horizontally inside the cube, Tàpies scribbled in Catalan a Picasso quote concerning *Guernica*,

¹⁹ "Proyectos y Realización del Monumento a Picasso, de Tàpies," *Butlletí de la Facultat de Belles Arts de la Universitat de Barcelona* (Barcelona), May 1983, 1.

²⁰ Anfosso, "La destrucción del confort como homenaje a Picasso," *Diario de Barcelona* (Barcelona), February 9, 1982.

his 1937 mural condemning the German aerial bombings of the Basque town during the Spanish Civil War. “A painting is not intended to decorate a drawing room but is instead a weapon of attack and defense against the enemy.”²¹ The famous quotation speaks about the social power and responsibility of art. For Picasso, art was not supposed to be lovely images that make beholders feel warm inside. Instead, he wanted to use art as a means of communicating ideas, important ideas about contemporary life and current events. The composition of *Guernica*, and the tremendous amount of preliminary sketches Picasso made before executing the work, demonstrates the artist’s abhorrence towards those responsible for the bombing of innocent civilians during the Spanish Civil War. The mural was not meant to be beautiful, it was meant to raise consciousness and funds for the Republicans during the war.²²

Tàpies’s monument, located on Passeig de Picasso near Parc de la Ciutadella, created a polemic when it was first installed. While some saw the new piece as an authentic work of contemporary art, others saw it simply as an ugly sculpture.²³ Newspapers published numerous opinion pieces weighing in on the sculpture with titles such as “A Polemic Monument,” “The Destruction of Comfort as Homage to Picasso,” and “First Stone.” The latter is a response *not* to the literal first stone laid to commence construction, but to one of the first critics metaphorically throwing a rock at the sculpture in disapproval.²⁴ Arguments on both sides of the debate assuredly augmented Tàpies’s reputation in Barcelona as a living artist. In an *El País* article discussing the polarized public opinion, art critic and professor at the Universitat de Barcelona Victoria Combalía expressed how contemporary art was taught to young students and experienced as a natural component of the urban environment in other countries. She concluded with the desire that, in two or three decades, everyone will be able to appreciate the value of the monument and its artistic merit.²⁵ An anonymous critic stated that the monument is nice for an exhibition and/or museum but that it is not appropriate for the street, and another claimed that

²¹ Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Tribute to Picasso, accessed July 22, 2016, <http://www.fundaciotapi.es.org/site/spip.php?rubrique646>.

²² Gijs van Hensbergen, *Guernica: The Biography of a Twentieth-Century Icon* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004).

²³ Victoria Combalía, “Un monumento polémico,” *El País* (Barcelona), March 21, 1983, 22.

²⁴ R. Santos Torroella, “Primera Piedra,” *La Vanguardia* (Barcelona), April 5, 1983, 7.

²⁵ Combalía, “Un monumento polémico,” 22. It is safe to say that Combalía’s hopes for the future have not yet been realized because art is an undervalued subject and often synonymous with crafts in Spain’s current public educational system. Understanding Modern and Postmodern art is often contingent upon a sound background in both art and social history, two subjects that math and science, in the increasingly popular ‘bilingual’ educational curriculum, often take precedent.



Figure 29- Photograph of the inauguration of *Monument Homenatge a Picasso* at the Universitat de Barcelona, *Diario de Barcelona*, Barcelona, May 3, 1983, Arxiu Fotogràfic de Barcelona

anyone who liked the project was absolutely crazy.²⁶ The Ajuntament de Barcelona took a risk in commissioning this high-profile work of art. The vast majority of Tàpies's works are difficult, ambiguous, nonconventional, polemic even. Nevertheless, important politicians attended the inauguration in support of the sculpture, including the Mayor of Barcelona, Pasqual Maragall (figure 29). There was also an exhibition at the Facultat de Belles Arts of the Universitat de Barcelona which led viewers through a multimedia demonstration of the processes of the creation of the monument. The display included biographic information of both Picasso and Tàpies, preliminary sketches of *Monument Homenatge a Picasso*, videos, photographic documentation, technical plans, and literature concerning the project. It is likely that photographs of the installation of the monument were included in this exhibition. A particularly ironic image, now in the Arxiu Fotogràfic de Barcelona that could have been included in the exhibition, is a photograph of the central parts of the sculpture covered in tarps and tied with ropes, to protect

²⁶ Glòria Picazo, "Tàpies: vestigis d'allò que existí," *Nous Horitzons*, March-May 1983, 30. Combalía, "Un monumento polémico," 22.



Figure 30- Photograph of the installation of *Monument Homenatge a Picasso, Diario de Barcelona*, Barcelona, March 11, 1983, Arxiu Fotogràfic de Barcelona (left)

Figure 31- Antoni Tàpies, *11 de setembre, 1983*, Sant Boi de Llobregat (right)

the work from the elements (figure 30). The picture echoes the image of the wrapped fountain from Tàpies's youth.

Monument Homenatge a Picasso is a work of art that essentially aligns Tàpies with Picasso, in its refusal to compromise style in order to appease critics or the public eye. As Rafael Santos Torroella discussed in an article published in *La Vanguardia*, the style of the monument is not different from previous Tàpies works publically shown in museums and galleries.²⁷ Furthermore he arrived at the crux of the artist's desires: Tàpies made ambiguous works of art in order to engage viewers; he wanted his art to instigate thought and to provoke ideas. As Tàpies wrote in his memoirs, "...these images, as most works of art, have never been an end in and of themselves, they should rather be viewed as a springboard, as a means to reach farther ends."²⁸ Similar to many artists of his time, what we see is not an idyllic, picturesque representation of the material world. Instead, artists like Tàpies, Rauschenberg, Malevich, de Kooning, etc., have given us something more challenging. They have inspired us to think, discuss, debate, reconsider, and repeat. Nothing about *Monument Homenatge a Picasso* is concrete. On the contrary, it is visibly transparent but also a bit blurry. It is meant to spur contradicting thoughts and generate a

²⁷ Santos Torroella, "Primera Piedra," 7.

²⁸ Tàpies, *Complete Writings Volume II. Collected Essays*, 107.

productive tension in memory of an artist who set an exceptionally high standard for future generations of artists to aspire.

Tàpies revealed another public project in Sant Boi de Llobregat, a suburb of Barcelona, in 1983. His mosaic *11 de setembre* (figure 31) in the town's Plaza Catalunya commemorates the historic Diada celebrated in the plaza in 1976, the year following Franco's death. This 'traditional' holiday celebration was a preamble to a demonstration on the same day the following year in Barcelona of over a million citizens crying for "liberty, amnesty, and a statue of autonomy" for Catalonia.²⁹ The Ajuntament de Sant Boi de Llobregat wanted to present the site as a "permanent symbol of Catalan identity and democracy."³⁰ At the time, PSC's Xavier Vila was the Mayor of Sant Boi de Llobregat. Tàpies's mosaic design on the ground of the plaza memorializes the date of the first nonclandestine Diada since 1938. The work consists of four lines, representing the bars of the Catalan flag, terminating in the shape of arrows pointing to the future. The date "11 setembre 1976" is laid amongst the bars. Both elements were made from earthy green and brick-colored tiles amidst a lightly colored marble background. The outlines created from the composition pleasingly echo the organic lines formed from the shade of nearby trees.

In March of 1983, close to 20,000 people attended the inauguration in Sant Boi de Llobregat of the donated artwork. Several politicians attended the act where Maria Aurèlia Capmany presented the integration of Catalonia as a model for a cohesive Europe, illustrating that in Sant Boi people from diverse backgrounds have come together as one community. The head of the Ministerio de Sanidad y Consumo and member of the PSC, Ernest Lluch, publically recalled his presence in the same plaza in 1976 and characterized that moment as both historical and emotional. Then he expressed his gratitude in Spanish to the non-Catalans that were also present on that historic day for their support during "the most difficult hours" in Catalonia.³¹

²⁹ Tradition is in quotation marks because, like many national events commemorating historical events, it has evolved into a nationalizing movement that has little to do with the actual historical circumstances that it presupposes. For more on the historic transformations and implications of the celebration of the Diada since the late nineteenth century until 2005, see: Martínez Fiol, "La construcción mítica del 'onze de setembre.'" More recent acts on the 11th of September in Barcelona have included enormous manifestations and isolated acts of enmity such as the burning flags and images of the King Juan Carlos I of Spain in 2008 and 2013. "La Audiencia Nacional investigará la quema de fotos del Rey durante la Diada," *El País* (Madrid: October 14, 2013), http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2013/10/14/actualidad/1381756290_943397.html.

³⁰ J. LL. D., "La plaza de Cataluña de Sant Boi de Llobregat nace como 'símbolo permanente de la catalanidad y la democracia,'" *El País* (Barcelona), March 14, 1983.

³¹ *Ibid.*

An inventory of Sant Boi's contemporary art collection indicates that there is another artwork from 1983 with the same title (*11 de setembre*) that forms part of the municipal's collection of paintings. Two Tàpies lithographs are also on the list (*Suite de Campins 2*, 1983 and *Suite de Campins 3*, 1984) along with a single Miró, (*Personaje solar*, 1974) and dozens of other works.³² The titles of Tàpies's work that belong to Sant Boi are more closely linked to other works he made for the Generalitat, as opposed to works for the Ajuntament de Barcelona. Their connection to Catalan nationalism is resolute. While Maragall's PSC in Barcelona sought to use Tàpies as a symbol of the city's modernity, Sant Boi's leaders decided to use Tàpies to demarcate a space of historic value to both Catalans and those who celebrated the Diada there in 1976. Sant Boi named a public school in honor of the artist in 1986. During the 1980s Tàpies began creating large-scale public installations in Catalonia. With new commissions from local government institutions, his work became more visible to both residents and tourists of the region. *Monument Homenatge a Picasso* became the focus of critical attention in the media and *11 de setembre* has permanently politicized the ground of Sant Boi's Plaza Catalunya.

The 1984 establishment of the Fundació Antoni Tàpies set forth with a plan to create a base in the center of Barcelona to amplify the artist's exposure and provided a space for contemporary art exhibitions. The same year, Tàpies decided that the best location for the newfound organization would be the historic Casa Montaner i Simón, an old publishing house located on Carrer d'Aragó and half a block from Passeig de Gràcia.³³ Located in the heart of Barcelona's l'Eixample neighborhood, the property's central location and historic design fit well with the newfound project. However, the future home of Fundació Antoni Tàpies required serious attention. A major renovation was necessary. The architect Lluís Domènech i Montaner had designed the structure in 1879 and it became one of Barcelona's first Modernist buildings. In the indicial phases of repairing the old space, the foundation received support from public institutions in Catalonia. In *Fundació Antoni Tàpies*, Miquel Tàpies, the artist's youngest child, wrote about his father's collaboration with the President of the Generalitat de Catalunya, Jordi Pujol, the Councilor of Culture, Joan Rigol, and the Mayor of Barcelona, Pasqual Maragall during the process.³⁴

³² "Fons municipal d'art contemporani," <http://www.santboi.cat/Publi089.nsf/...>

³³ Borja-Villel, *Fundació Antoni Tàpies*, 12.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

In an *El País* article published on March 14, 1987, Maragall expressed that Tàpies's project would convert the building into one of the "epicenters of Barcelona's modernity."³⁵ This statement fit with the PSC and Ajuntament's project to project the *Ciudad Condal* as a modern, progressive place. The articulation of Barcelona and Spain's "modernity" would later become magnified as the city began preparations to host the 1992 Olympic Games. Tàpies, for the Mayor of Barcelona in the late 1980s, was a figure whose projects could help position Barcelona as one of Europe's most cultivated cities.

The renovations of the casa Montaner i Simón were made possible with funding from the Ajuntament, Generalitat, and the Spanish Ministerio de Cultura. In 1987, important contracts were signed with these bodies that set the plan in motion.³⁶ Fundació Antoni Tàpies, however, is a private entity. The artist was theoretically able to organize the project as he wished. In the late 1980s he began to model a sculpture to adorn the top of the building and he established the major goals of the foundation: to further the understanding of contemporary art and culture, to periodically show Tàpies's own works, and to build a library of art and design with a global perspective. Through temporary exhibitions, seminars, symposia, publications, film sessions, etc. the foundation would seek to further the study of art and culture in relation to, and beyond, the art of its founder. While preparing the building to open to the public would take several years, Tàpies had found a charming space for his latest project in the casa Montaner i Simón. The following chapters will examine the 1990 inauguration of the Fundació Antoni Tàpies and the building's crowning sculpture, in addition to a number of other public projects completed in the 1990s.

3.3 How Politics Affect Art

During the renovation of the foundation's new property, the Ajuntament de Barcelona organized an exhibition titled *Tàpies els anys 80* in collaboration with the Universitat de les Illes Balears.³⁷

³⁵ Juan José Navarro Arisa, "El Ayuntamiento de Barcelona cede a Tàpies un edificio que albergará la fundación del artista," *El País*, March 14, 1987, accessed August 28, 2016, http://elpais.com/diario/1987/03/14/cultura/542674807_850215.html.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁷ "Tàpies: els anys 80," Universitat de les Illes Balears, accessed June 2, 2015, <http://canal.uib.cat/canals/Tapies-els-anys-80.cid237087?categoryId=100135&showMonth=166774>.

Held in a fifteenth century Gothic building whose facade forms part of the maritime wall in Palma de Mallorca, *la Llotja*, the show focused on the artist's works during the first eight years of the 1980s. Portable white walls were used to hang the artworks in the enormous building. The high ceilings provided room for Tàpies's large canvases to breathe. The accompanying publication discusses the artist's commitment to social issues, albeit in an unconventional manner. "Tàpies shows a great spiritual fortitude of the weak against the ample, uniform presence of power. He clashes brutal activism with passive, mute paintings."³⁸ While it is not always evident in every picture the artist made, he worked, like Picasso and Miró before him, with an intense devotion to *both* politics and culture. For all three artists, pictures were not meant to "decorate apartments," as Picasso famously stated. The work of these artists are socially engaged, provocative, and far from neutral. However, these individuals gained recognition in the art world for making politically charged images that also pushed the conventions of representation to a new level: Picasso with his cubist creations, Miró with his floating figures, and Tàpies with his chromophobic canvases. The combination of political content and visual experimentation was, for these three artists, their contribution to a much larger debate concerning contemporary issues. Why did they each work in this way? Experiencing art is completely different from reading, listening, or conversing. Art is a visual mode of representation, encountered in space, rather than time. Art does not rely on any conventional order to lead to understanding, like words on a page and sentences in a paragraph. For this reason, it is often susceptible to debate concerning content and meaning. This friction that art produces yet tends not to solve, especially in ambiguous works like Tàpies's, provokes thought and conversation. The artist, in this case, is not a divine figure but like the moderator of a debate, instigating active participation in the conceptualization of particular social and political issues that require immediate attention. Through politically engaged art, culture and politics become inseparable properties bound to a picture that, once exhibited in public, is rarely unbiased.

In the context of the *Tàpies els anys 80* exhibition it is made clear that politics affect art both directly and indirectly. The direct connection comes from the public funds that were used to organize the exhibition. The Ajuntament de Barcelona supported the event and subsequent publication, both financially and symbolically. The indirect link between politics and art stems

³⁸ "Tàpies demuestra el gran poder espiritual de la impotencia frente a la ampulosa y uniformada presencia del poder. Al brutal activismo le opone él la pasividad y sus cuadros mudos." *Tàpies els anys 80*, 75.

from the artist's conception of his own identity within historical and contemporary society and how he channeled that into the creative process. In a way, this type of indirect agency is unavoidable. What makes his artwork interesting, however, was his ability to take historical and sociopolitical issues and present them in a visual, non-verbal manner.

For example, *Gran diptic roig i negre* (1980, figure 32) consists of two large, irregular blocks of color, one is black and the other is a shade of ivory. In the center of the diptych the two are hastily united via crisscrossing lines of bright red. The suture binds two disparate entities, however the stitches are the color of blood. Ambiguous yet clearly political in its connotations, this canvas makes the viewer wonder what two contrasting blocks were sewn together with blood. Tàpies's *Gran diptic roig i negre* gets a powerful message across, albeit an unclear message, in a matter of seconds, whereas a story concerning two dissimilar entities brought together through bloodshed and violence would have taken several minutes to tell. This canvas, shown in *Tàpies els anys 80* demonstrates the artist's desire to present political topics, while leaving the decision-making up to the audience. It is not an instructional work of art, pointing to a concrete conclusion or predetermined destination. Instead, it presents themes for further reflection such as polarity and suture.



Figure 32- Antoni Tàpies, *Gran diptic roig i negre*, 1980

More concrete examples of links between politics and art are evident in Tàpies's *A la memòria de Salvador Puig Antich* (figure 22) and *11 de setembre* (figure 31). The former shows us the artist's stance through its title, indicating Tàpies's sympathies with the anarchist accused of murder and sentenced to death via an antique killing device. This is an indirect example, as Tàpies positioned himself in response to an event carried out by the Francoist dictatorship. The latter is an enormous visual reminder, in a public space, of a historical date that has come to represent the resilience of the Catalan community. It is direct, although the artist donated his time spent on the design, the Ajuntament de Sant Boi de Llobregat sought out Tàpies for the project because of his iconic status and commitment to perpetuating the notion of a unified Catalan culture.

In examining a particular artwork, it is not always evident that there is a direct or indirect link to the realm of politics. For example, the 1989 ink, gouache and collage on paper titled *La bota i el mitjó* (figure 33) does not have any overt reference to civil affairs. The picture consists of various black marks: some are partially transparent sprayed on like graffiti, some are heavy, jet black lines hastily slapped on the paper, and some are thinner, more defined, yet also applied with a sense of haste. Two flat forms in the shape of a foot and knee with the color of a brown paper bag are glued over the black marks. The image is not clear. However, it is obvious is that Tàpies made it. Besides the small signature on the bottom left, the darkest and most prominent aspect of the work is the cross in the middle. This symbol works to immediately identify the artist. By 1989, Tàpies had already created a repertoire of vague and nontraditionally beautiful works, and this collage belongs to that body of work. As an individual image it may not signify much in terms of political ideologies. However, it exists as a part of a larger group, a collection with a consistent style, developed during a specific historical moment and forever tied to the early struggles of the artist to represent himself as both an international and Catalan artist working under a repressive regime. This trademark style that Tàpies created during the early years of his career



Figure 33- Antoni Tàpies, *La bota i el mitjó*, 1989

is very much political in its enigmatic subject matter and lackluster colors. Even though *La bota i el mitjó* was made fourteen years after the death of Franco, the style binds it with prior works developed during particular political conditions, which inhibited the artist from freely expressing himself. It is indirectly political for its symbolic content and stylistic similarity to former compositions.

Beyond analyzing individual works of art, it is also worthwhile to examine entire bodies of works. Politics indirectly affected Tàpies's style during the transition to democracy, in that his resilience to change further legitimized his previous works. His desire for liberty and love for the unconventional in art did not diminish once new political freedoms were established in Spain. His art did not mirror political society. Instead, his art demonstrates a complex relationship with the past, present, and future "imagined community" in which he identified himself as belonging to.³⁹

Tàpies actively negotiated his political ideologies in visual terms. Did Tàpies instigate measurable political change? Not quite. However, if we are to read success in terms of a binary structure (the opposite being failure) we cannot say that he failed to address real political situations through works of art. He sought to do so through visual ideas. Politics is intrinsically tied to any creative act made public. Tàpies knowingly embraced this fact, and sought to reproduce his personal viewpoint in terms of matter in space rather than words in time. His artwork does not seek definitive conclusions or concrete courses of action. Instead, it aims at instigating thought and reflection, a habit or skill that is increasingly undervalued in a world saturated in the shiny, seductive advertisements that accompany capitalist societies. Tàpies was not a militant of a political party, but he did contribute to "the continent that lies beyond"⁴⁰ the discernible politics (Scott's visible shoreline) of a politically unstable Spain. The following chapter will outline more concrete, direct links between politics and art, most prominently through financial support and commissions from public institutions that the artist received during the final decade of the twentieth century and into the first years of the twenty-first century.

³⁹ Benedict Anderson's term works to demonstrate the constructed nature of a national population and how individuals imagine themselves as part of a community although they may never know or even see the vast majority of others that belong to the same group. *Imagined Communities*. Later studies concerning nationalization and national identity consider everyday experiences and emotions as fundamental in the creation of a national population. See: Billig, *Banal Nationalism* and Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*. Finally, Quiroga offers a theoretical model that considers both the official national discourse and the everyday experiences and how they work in nations where two or more nationalities are contested in "The Three Spheres..."

⁴⁰ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 199.

3.4 Concluding Remarks

In a historiographical chapter on Cultural Studies, Miguel Ángel del Arco Blanco explained how the discipline utilizes particular perspectives to examine the interactions between culture, power, and society. Historians, he states, ought to keep this in mind as they write history.⁴¹ While history tends to focus on realities of the past, the interdisciplinary nature of cultural studies allows for greater attention to both historical realities and fictions. Del Arco expressed that in order to represent the past, we must take into consideration two narratives: the “realist” history that is pieced together using primary sources and the world of fiction and imagination which permits reality to seep in.⁴² Art engages in both of these realms. However, attention is too often focused on the creative and imaginary aspect of visual culture. Picasso is said to have once stated, “everything you can imagine is real.”⁴³ This is important to remember when considering the work of Tàpies. He created fictions that are not isolated from reality. Art, as a mere part of a wider culture, is always engaged with power and politics, directly or indirectly.⁴⁴

This chapter, together with the previous one, shows that the production of art is a political process. Tàpies created a unique style in the 1950s and decided to keep working with it in order to demonstrate his ideological commitment to particular values. Politics had a direct affect on the artist’s production because of his personal experiences, desires, and understanding of his own personal identity as a Catalan and anti-Francoist. He became an artistic icon in Catalonia under specific circumstances. His international success as an avant-garde artist working in an almost abstract style bolstered his reputation at home. Further support came from local and regional governments via public commissions, awards, and financial patronage. The regional government found Tàpies’s appealing to create visualizations that were congruent with the CiU’s nationalist narrative that depicted Catalonia as a nation since the Middle Ages. The Ajuntament also found the artist useful in order to rebuild Barcelona as a modern, cultivated European city in the final decade of the twentieth century. Both the Generalitat’s conservative coalition and the Ajuntament’s socialist party found ways to use the art of Tàpies, as the following chapter will

⁴¹ Del Arco Blanco, “Un paso más allá de la historia cultural: los *cultural studies*,” 20.

⁴² Ibid., 13.

⁴³ Alexandra George, *Constructing Intellectual Property* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 10.

⁴⁴ See: Mihelj, *Media Nations*, 10.

explain in greater detail. The artist achieved an iconic status while maintaining an unwavering artistic style that he continued to use throughout the 1990s. The proceeding chapters will focus on how particular public institutions have promoted the artist and how a selection of different cultural centers have presented his works of art.



4 A New Foundation and an Old Sock

“Why wouldn’t Tàpies make a living off of *antifranquismo*?
It is a known, profitable enterprise.”

Luis Apostua¹

This chapter looks at the role that the Generalitat de Catalunya and the Ajuntament de Barcelona played in supporting Tàpies through public commissions and financial support of his foundation towards the end of his artistic career. Through an analysis of artworks created specifically for public and semi-public spaces, the relationship between the art world and that of politics is bridged. I refer to both spaces as accessible to the public, however private entities govern semi-public locations such as the Fundació Antoni Tàpies. The nature of the relationship between art and politics is curious, particularly when considering the thoughts and emotions of a third party, the public. “A New Foundation and an Old Sock” explains how Tàpies’s work is bound to the institutions that support it. The first section focuses on the 1990 inauguration of the Fundació Antoni Tàpies in Barcelona and a Catalan nationalist mural that the artist made for the Generalitat during the same year. The following section introduces several public projects that Tàpies made during the last decade of the twentieth century, including the planning of a controversial project that politicians weighed in on, and was eventually halted after months of debate. Finally, the concluding remarks concern the nature of public funding and works of art, the main theme of this chapter.

4.1 Financial and Institutional Support

Upon joining the European Economic Community in 1986, Spain was considerably behind other European nations in terms of gross domestic product per capita. Through this incorporation, to which would later become the European Union, the value of the Spanish currency, the *peseta*, increased. In the early 1990s during a global recession, Spain supported the push for a common

¹ “¿Por qué no va a vivir Tàpies de antifranquismo? Es negocio de reconocia rentabilidad.” Luis Apostua, “Calcetín con millones,” *Navarra Hoy*, February 9, 1992.

European currency. Before the 1992 Olympic Games, Barcelona poured money into a host of projects to prepare the city for the event.² Despite the fluctuating state of the economy during final decade of the twentieth century, Catalan local and regional governments supported public arts initiatives. By the late 1990s the country was already recovering from the recession, employment rates were on the rise, and property values were going up. Once the Euro began circulation in the Eurozone in 2002, the Basque Country, Catalonia, and Madrid were reaching high employment rates and the Spanish economy was healthy again.³

In 1990 Tàpies finished a mural for the Sala Tarradellas in the Palau de la Generalitat titled *Les quatre cròniques* (figure 4). There is a photograph that documented the artist signing a contract to create paintings for the Sala Màdico, currently known as the Sala Tàpies; sitting next to Tàpies on the left side of the image, which was taken on March 16, 1989 (figure 34), was Joan Guitart, the Generalitat's Councilor of Culture at the time. However, the specific terms of the contract are unknown and the economic compensation for the project has not been published. The Generalitat decided to change the location of *Les quatre cròniques* in 2006, relocating it to a prominent room used for meetings and regularly accessible to the media (figure 35). Toni Tàpies could not recall the specifics of the commission, but he assured me that his father, when he was asked to make works such as this one, would have chosen the subject matter. He explained that the Generalitat asked for a work to fit in a specific space, but they would not have specified what, exactly, he should paint.⁴ The two-by-six meter painting often appears in the background of twenty-first century news reports concerning official matters of the Generalitat and high-profile figures that visit the government building because of its current location in the Sala Tarradellas. Similar to his mosaic design in Sant Boi de Llobregat, this work takes on a Catalan theme.

The mural consists of four panels, which could clarify why the short text on the back of the photograph refers to murals in plural, each dedicated to a medieval biographical manuscript written in Catalan. Reading from left to right, the first is dedicated to King Jaume I and his thirteenth century *Llibre dels Fets*.⁵ The second is about Bernat Desclot's 1288 account *Llibre*

² For the contradictory nature of the 1992 celebrations in Spain see: Balfour and Quiroga, *The Reinevntion of Spain*, 168-171.

³ Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Encuesta de empleo del tiempo 2002-2003, accessed June 13, 2016, <http://www.ine.es/daco/daco42/empleo/dacoet.htm>.

⁴ Interview with Toni Tàpies, February 4, 2016.

⁵ Presumably the first autobiographical account of a medieval king in Europe, the original *Llibre dels fets* was lost. Jaume II commissioned a Latin translation of his father's work, although the earliest surviving copy dates from 1343, after Jaume II's death. Scholars believe that Jaume I did not actually write out the work, instead he dictated to



Figure 34- Photograph of Tàpies signing documents at the Palau de la Generalitat, Barcelona, March 16, 1989, Arxiu Fotogràfic de Barcelona

del rei en Pere d'Aragó e dels seus antecessors passats in addition to his “great deeds and conquests.” The next concerns the chronicle of nobleman Ramon Muntaner and his expeditions (1325-1328), represented in the mural with the four red bars of the Catalan flag and Muntaner’s benevolent phrase “*què us dire?*” [what shall I tell you?]. The fourth and final panel is about the autobiographical work of King Pere III (1382-1385) that contains an allegorical, biblical text. As a whole, the *Les quatre cròniques* is consistent with Tàpies style discussed in the previous chapters. There are legible markings and symbols yet the entirety of the picture gives an effect via the formal elements (color, line, shape, texture, perspective, and facture), not a specific statement about these literary works or their value. It is only through the title and location of the work that these chronicles become increasingly cherished. *Les quatre cròniques* memorializes

scribes, and there is even some speculation as to whether or not the king knew how to write himself. *The Book Of Deeds of James I of Aragon. A translation of the medieval Catalan Llibre dels fets*, Trans. Damian Smith and Helen Buffery, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 10.



Figure 35- Photograph of Artur Mas discussing the unofficial referendum in Catalonia with Tàpies's *Les quatre cròniques* (1990) in the background, Barcelona, November 11, 2014

medieval works written in Catalan in an entirely political fashion. The art works to remind beholders of the historicity and importance of a language that was neither legally recognized nor valued in Franco's Spain.

The fact that the Generalitat confided in Tàpies to carry out this commission is interesting. Since 1980, Pujol and CiU had maintained power of the autonomous government and would continue to do so until 2003. The CiU was formed in 1978 as a Catalan nationalist coalition uniting CDC and Unió Democràtica de Catalunya (UDC). Throughout the 1980s, as Andrew Dowling reported, "the Pujolist discourse equated any attack on, or even lack of support for, Pujol or CiU with an attack on Catalonia and the identification of Catalanism with Pujolism became increasingly common."⁶ However, Pujol proved purposefully ambiguous in his political strategy concerning Catalan nationalism, taking care to maintain a balance between proto state building discourse within Barcelona and a more moderate position in Madrid.⁷

⁶ Andrew Dowling, *Catalonia Since the Spanish Civil War: Reconstructing the Nation* (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2013), 111.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 123.

Closely linked to Pujol and CiU's nationalist agenda was the emphasis on language and its importance in political and civil society. During the 1960s and 1970s Spanish-speaking immigrants flocked to Catalonia, while first generation immigrants may not have learned Catalan, their children would under the public education system. Tàpies's mural for the Generalitat effectively aggrandizes medieval literature that links the language to the land. Beyond the emphasis on the Catalan language, the use of these particular manuscripts as subject matter works to perpetuate the idea of Catalonia as an imagined community with a tremendously long history. Using the past, as a means to identify with centuries old civilizations, is a common strategy of nationalization, as it creates a sense of belonging and continuity for individuals. Guibernau discussed Pujol's stance concerning the importance of language in *Catalan Nationalism: Francoism, Transition and Democracy* as "crucial for Catalonia to maintain and develop its specific identity, which goes back to the Middle Ages."⁸ This sort of language is representative of a continually evoked strategy to justify the idea that Catalan identity is historical and, through extension, significant. It is fitting that the topic of *Les quatre cròniques* was in accordance with the coalition's nationalist aspirations and idealization of the Middle Ages as the foundational moment of the Catalan nation, while the same artist's works for the Ajuntament de Barcelona tend to engage less with *catalanisme* and more with innovation in contemporary artistic practices, as seen in *Monument Homenatge a Picasso* (figure 28) and *Complement miraculós* (2000, figure 36).

In addition to commissioning public and semi-public artworks (works that belong to public institutions but are not always accessible to the public), the Generalitat and the Ajuntament de Barcelona financially supported the Fundació Antoni Tàpies. These two entities, along with the Spanish Ministerio de Cultura, contributed significant funds to support the establishment of the 'private' foundation, and have done so on an annual basis since the year prior to its opening in 1990.⁹ Furthermore, the Ajuntament de Barcelona played an even greater role in the years leading up to the inauguration. It seems there were some obstacles for the Fundació to purchase the Casa Montaner i Simón building, however it is unclear what the nature

⁸ Guibernau, *Catalan Nationalism: Francoism, Transition and Democracy* (London: Routledge, 2004), 144. For more on language and identity in Catalonia see: Fernández, "Becoming Normal: cultural production and cultural policy in Catalonia," 343; and Molinero and Ysàs, *La cuestión catalana*, 250-259.

⁹ For an extensive examination of this sort of model see: Joaquim Rius Ulldemolins, "Política cultural e hibridación de las instituciones culturales. El caso de Barcelona," *Revista Española de Ciencia Política* 29 (July 2012).



Figure 36- Antoni Tàpies, *Complement miraculós*, 2000

of this problem was, but it was most likely financial and/or legal in nature. As the artist's youngest son, Miquel, wrote in the introduction to the book *Fundació Antoni Tàpies*, the Ajuntament de Barcelona was interested in the project, and decided to “acquire” the edifice, pay for the renovations, and grant it to the foundation. The Mayor of Barcelona Pasqual Maragall signed a contract with Tàpies in early 1987, which definitively established the old Casa Montaner i Simón as a new cultural space in the urban district of l'Eixample. Preparing the building to function as the site of the *Fundació Antoni Tàpies* began in the spring of 1987. The Ministerio de Cultura paid for interior museum installations after the major renovations, that the Ajuntament financed, were completed.

The foundation has not made information concerning annual contributions from the Generalitat, Ajuntament, and Ministerio readily available to the public and, since it is a private institution, is not legally responsible to do so. The Generalitat, however, has facilitated a record of the exact amounts that it paid to the foundation since 1989 (figure 37). Extrapolating from a 2015 report concerning the fragile financial situation of the foundation, the Generalitat has spent the most on a yearly basis, ranging from 150,000 to 839,869 euros per year, while the

Ajuntament pays less per year (529,410 euros in 2015). However, it seems the Ajuntament took on greater initial investments in purchasing and renovating the building. Finally, the Ministerio de Cultura pays the least of the three supporting bodies, 48,740 euros in 2015, significantly less than the Tàpies family's donation of 100,000 euros in both 2014 and 2015.¹⁰

1989	150.000,00 €
1990	150.000,00 €
1991	150.000,00 €
1992	210.000,00 €
1993	300.000,00 €
1994	300.000,00 €
1995	300.000,00 €
1996	240.000,00 €
1997	300.000,00 €
1998	270.000,00 €
1999	270.000,00 €
2000	300.000,00 €
2001	300.000,00 €
2002	300.506,00 €
2003	330.550,00 €
2004	330.557,00 €
2005	340.560,00 €
2006	372.600,00 €
2007	385.000,00 €
2008	395.000,00 €
2009 ¹¹	376.520,00 €
2010	535.550,00 €
2011	478.550,00 €
2012	839.869,94 €
2013	795.602,41 €
2014	795.602,41 €
2015	795.602,41 €

Figure 37- Financial contributions of the Generalitat de Catalunya Departament de Cultura to Fundació Antoni Tàpies 1989-2015

		normal contribution	interest loan	amortized loan
2009 ¹¹	376.520,00 €			
2010	535.550,00 €	380.000,00 €	155.550,00 €	
2011	478.550,00 €	323.425,00 €	155.125,00 €	
2012	839.869,94 €	323.000,00 €	155.550,00 €	361.318,94 €
2013	795.602,41 €	278.733,47 €	138.639,82 €	378.229,12 €
2014	795.602,41 €	278.733,47 €	121.383,12 €	395.485,82 €
2015	795.602,41 €	278.733,47 €	103.339,08 €	413.529,86 €

¹⁰ “La Fundació Tàpies, en la corda fluixa,” *Ara*, June 6, 2015.

¹¹ On September 16, 2009 the Generalitat signed a subsidy agreement, contributing 4,445,782.54 euros split between normal annual contributions, interest loans, and amortized loans to help pay for a renovation that kept the foundation closed to the public from January 2008 until March 2010.



Figure 38- Antoni Tàpies, *Núvol i cadira*, 1990

For the foundation's opening in 1990, Tàpies crowned the building with a curious sculpture made out of 2,750 meters of aluminum tubing. *Núvol i cadira* [Cloud and chair] is a twelve by twenty-four meter cluster of metal spiraling around the top of the building like an intimidating barbed wire fence (figure 38). Rising from the cloud of chaos is a delicate outline of a chair, positioned like a lofty throne yet slanted so that it almost disappears when viewed from certain angles. Chairs are, like the pair of scissors, a recurring element in the body of the artist's work. Perhaps Tàpies admired Vincent Van Gogh's 1888 painting of his own chair and its portrait like quality, created during a time when portraits of anything other than human beings were practically nonexistent (figure 39). Tàpies was fond of the Dutch artist's work and on June 4, 1951 he sent a postcard to his friend Joan Brossa, member of Dau al Set and avant-garde poet who wrote exclusively in Catalan, from Amsterdam with a photograph of one of Van Gogh's



Figure 39- Vincent van Gogh, *Van Gogh's Chair*, 1888

paintings. It is also possible that Tàpies's use of this type of chair sought to nullify Henri Matisse's 1908 statement from "Notes of a Painter." The leader of Fauvism claimed his desires for an art without depressing subject matter, an art that would have "an appeasing influence, like a mental soother, something like a good armchair in which to rest from physical fatigue."¹² Chairs are commonplace objects that, for Tàpies and Brossa's generation, provide a place to think and have little to do with the lofty utopia that Matisse dreamed about decades before. Like a beacon marking the building as a sanctuary for thinking, *Núvol i cadira* is what distinguishes the old Casa Montaner i Simón from the new Fundació Antoni Tàpies, which opened its doors to the public on June 5, 1990.

ABC described the new space as "brilliant," serving the purpose of the foundation's objectives, with a lovely facade that is topped with a chair for the thinker.¹³ Guitart expressed his esteem for the institution, stating in an interview with me that the Fundació Antoni Tàpies is undoubtedly deserving of public support and collaboration.¹⁴ The project would not have been possible without the aid of the Generalitat de Catalunya, the Ajuntament de Barcelona, the Ministerio de Cultura, or Antoni Tàpies's investments. The continued support of these three institutions, in addition to the evident donations from the Tàpies family, has enabled the continued success of the cultural endeavor for over twenty-five years.

One of the first artworks that Tàpies donated to the foundation was a Miró sculpture that he received when he won the Premio Príncipe de Asturias de las Artes in 1990. This prestigious annual prize has been awarded to musicians, artists, architects, cinematographers, and dancers since 1981. Tàpies was the first Catalan bestowed with this honor. *ABC's* account of the event emphasized the Spanish and European nature of the artist's work.¹⁵ *La Vanguardia* published two articles on the same page about the award. The first talked about Tàpies's gratitude towards Prince Felipe's visit to the artist's studio. The second, at the bottom of the same page, referred to Tàpies as *barcelonés* [from Barcelona] and "very European," stating that his new foundation will

¹² Henri Matisse, "Notes of a Painter," *Theories of Modern Art*, 135.

¹³ "La Fundación Antoni Tàpies abre sus puertas," *ABC*, June 7, 1990, 146, accessed June 13, 2016, <http://hemeroteca.abc.es/nav/Navigate.exe/hemeroteca/madrid/abc/1990/06/07/146.html>.

¹⁴ Interview with Joan Guitart, July 12, 2016.

¹⁵ "Antoni Tàpies galardonado con el Príncipe de Asturias ..." *ABC* (Sevilla), May 19, 1990, 61.

present his innovative works to the “*pueblo español*.”¹⁶ In a statement about the award published in *El País*, Jordi Pujol defined Tàpies as “an artist, Catalan, and patriot.”¹⁷ In doing so, the President of the Generalitat signaled that Tàpies is one of ‘us,’ a proud Catalan. However, Pujol and CiU shared what Dowling expressed as “a limited and limiting conception of Catalan culture, one that was often mocked by metropolitan intellectuals as one of *cantaires* and *sardanas* [singing and folk dances].”¹⁸ Tàpies undoubtedly shared this sentiment. Pujol, in ignoring the difference between Tàpies’s leftist political philosophy and his own allegiance to the conservative CiU, sought to focus on their shared Catalan identity and use that to bring Tàpies closer to himself, adding the artist to his ample collection of Catalan patriots. The artist humbly accepted the award, appreciative for the committee’s recognition of his “artistic and professional maturity,” yet he told the press that he would have been more emotional to have had won something like this when he was twenty-five years old. He went on to explain that prizes help to encourage younger artists, both artistically and economically.¹⁹ Nevertheless, he graciously received the recognition and set out to support future generations of artists in a different way.

In 1990, Gregory Rood directed a documentary about Tàpies. The film aired in Barcelona on TVE Catalunya in June and shortly after on the United Kingdom’s BBC as part of the *Omnibus* series.²⁰ Tàpies spoke about his motivation as an artist and thinker in the film:

What drives an artist is a desire to know the truth... to search for a true equilibrium, to find a perfect balance between what a man knows and what he does, seems to me to be one of the most beautiful ends to which an artist can direct himself, and not only an artist, it should be the ambition of anyone who thinks seriously about the world.²¹

¹⁶ Sergio Vila-San-Juan, “Antoni Tàpies recibe el premio Príncipe de Asturias de las Artes,” and Vicente González, “El pintor barcelonés no figuraba en la lista de artistas preseleccionados,” *La Vanguardia*, May 19, 1990, accessed August 28, 2016, <http://hemeroteca.lavanguardia.com/preview/1990/05/19/pagina-37/33022907/pdf.html?search=Premio%20Pr%C3%ADncipe%20de%20Asturias%20Antoni%20T%C3%A0pies>.

¹⁷ Catalina Serra, “El Pintor Antoni Tàpies gana el Premio Príncipe de Asturias de las Artes,” *El País*, May 13, 1990, accessed June 19, 2016, http://elpais.com/diario/1990/05/19/cultura/643068006_850215.html.

¹⁸ Dowling, *Catalonia Since the Spanish Civil War*, 131.

¹⁹ Serra, “El Pintor Antoni Tàpies gana el Premio Príncipe de Asturias de las Artes.”

²⁰ Catalina Serra, “TVE- Cataluña y la BBC colaboran en un documental sobre Tàpies,” *El País*, June 28, 1990, accessed June 19, 2016, http://elpais.com/diario/1990/06/28/radiotv/646524002_850215.html. Daniel Hernandez also directed a documentary film on Tàpies titled *Alfabet Tàpies*, which aired in December of 2003 on Televisió de Catalunya.

²¹ *Tàpies*, Gregory Rood (dir.), BBC and TVE Catalunya, 1990.

The documentary's release coincided with the Fundació Antoni Tàpies opening to the public. The center has worked to promote the work of contemporary artists in Barcelona through a variety of exhibitions, workshops, lectures, film screenings, family activities, and performances. Through extension, political establishments have made these programs possible and accessible to the public. Tàpies was able to stabilize his reputation as the top living artist in the region and encourage future generations of artists to follow in his footsteps through a great deal of financial and institutional support. During the final decade of the twentieth century, the socialist run Ajuntament and conservative Generalitat were led by competing power structures, however both sought to establish a closer relationship with Tàpies and his work, albeit with differing objectives, which we will see as this chapter unfolds.

4.2 “Mr. Tàpies’s Unmatched Sock” and Other Public Works

In 1992 Tàpies's painted a mural for the Catalan Pavilion at the Universal Exposition in Sevilla. The event was organized to commemorate the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' first journey to the Americas. Over 100 countries participated in the Expo, which ran from April to October. Most pavilions attracted visitors through showcasing their interesting architectural designs. For example, Japan boasted the construction of the largest wooden structure in the world and the popular pavilion of Kuwait showed off their segmented, movable roof. The Catalan building, however, employed Tàpies's artwork to captivate crowds (figure 40). The composition of the wall adorning the outside of the building is tendentious, albeit not entirely representational. It combines letters, symbols, and markings to connote Catalan nationalistic sentiments while simultaneously serving as a signpost for the pavilion. The enormous work consists of four major elements: the handprint, a large quasi-fist, two of the artist's trademark “+” markings, and the word *Catalunya*. A sketched form that could represent the socialist fist splits through the middle of the letters. There are a pair of intersecting lines on each side of the painting, that curious cross-like symbol frequent in Tàpies's work. Finally the “C” that begins the word *Catalunya* in the mural is shaped like the *barretina* that Miró's representations of Catalan peasants each adorn in both *Cap de pagès català* paintings (figures 2 and 3). The mural deliberately resonates with Miró's nationalist compositions and embraces an aesthetic of violence through the handprint and



Figure 40- Antoni Tàpies, Mural for the Catalan Pavilion, 1992, Sevilla Universal Exposition

the dark red color. Furthermore, it is consistent with the ideas that Tàpies expressed in 1977 concerning the connotations of walls. Its resemblance to cave paintings and its tactile quality suggests that it could be a “testimonial to the passage of time.”²² Time was an important theme for Tàpies, particularly in works that seek to evoke the idea that Catalonia is a historically cohesive unit, as opposed to a region composed of a variety of different landscapes, cultures, and histories. Both *Pintura romànica i barretina* (figure 1) and *Les quatre cròniques* (figure 4) are consistent with the mural’s style and similarly aim to achieve this sense of Catalan unity.

One of the most striking aspects of the Expo ’92 mural is that it repudiates the Spanish or Castilian spelling of his nation: *Cataluña*. In using *Catalunya*, Tàpies demonstrated his allegiance to his mother tongue and broadcast that this was the most appropriate name to designate the pavilion. While the official languages of the event were Spanish and English, it is clear that the artist decided to present the vernacular spelling, which highlights the historical importance of Catalan and the promotion of its revitalization. Article 3 of the 1978 Spanish

²² Tàpies, *Complete Writings Volume I. A Personal Memoir: Fragments for an Autobiography*, 290.

Constitution recognizes Castilian as the nation's official language while granting power to the autonomous communities to determine co-official languages. For many Catalans, this is a fundamental freedom of supreme importance. The semantic aspect of this artwork is interesting because it expresses linguistic liberty to a geographically diverse audience that traveled to visit the exposition in Andalucía.

Furthermore, since 1983 Pujol and CiU had been working towards 'linguistic normalization,' a strategy that went hand in hand with the coalition's nationalist aims. Legislative acts were passed in order to convert Catalan into the "normal language of the public sphere," with the major focus being in the public education system.²³ As a result, the understanding of the Catalan language rose significantly from 81% of the population of Catalonia in 1981 to 94.5% in 2001.²⁴ In 1993, *ABC* published an article titled "Like Franco, but the reverse," concerning Catalonia's attempt to supposedly wipe out the Spanish language from the region.²⁵ Despite criticism like *ABC*'s accusation, Pujol's project concerning language revival was not greatly contested in Spain during the 1980s and 1990s. However, in the 2000s the conservative government of José María Aznar unsuccessfully tried to impose a Spanish history curriculum that, as a result, would have eliminated considerable teaching time in the Catalan language. Catalan nationalist's devotion to official language policies clashed with conservatives that backed a new wave of Spanish nationalism stemming from Madrid. Tàpies's mural for the Catalan pavilion was created at a time when the legal linguistic 'normalization' in Catalonia was on the threshold, about to become a more contentious topic of debate in Spain.

Spain hosted both the Universal Exposition and Olympic Games in 1992. For savvy individuals and businesses these enormous events provided an opportunity to make money, quickly and not necessarily in a legal manner (*pelotazo*). In his fictional novel published in 1993, *Sabotaje olímpico*, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán satirized the economic, cultural, and moral consequences of these two events, describing them as "privileged dramatizations" of Spain's modernity.²⁶ He went on joking, "if nobody checked themselves into a mental hospital for being against the Olympic Games, it was not due to tolerance, but the *exhibition* of tolerance. It [Spain]

²³ Dowling, *Catalonia Since the Spanish Civil War*, 127.

²⁴ Daniel E. Jones, "Pujol y la construcción de un espacio catalán de comunicación. Interacciones entre instituciones políticas y empresas mediáticas (1980-2003)," *Ámbitos* (16, 2007: 499-524), 505-506.

²⁵ Dowling, *Catalonia Since the Spanish Civil War*, 130.

²⁶ Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, *Sabotaje olímpico* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1993), Kindle loc. 115.

was surrounded by exhibitionists.”²⁷ Exhibiting Spain as both modern and European was one of the primary goals leading up to the Olympics, people in Spain even associated modernity with “being European” at this time.²⁸ One of Tàpies’s previous works for the cover of the 1985 Europalia International Arts Festival in Brussels linked Spain to European modernity. In 1986, Spain joined the European Economic Community, and would go on to spend an estimated three trillion euros on new construction in Catalonia prior to the commencement of the Olympic Games on July 25, 1992.²⁹ Both public and private funds were poured into the city of Barcelona in order to prepare for the international event. CiU made an outstanding effort to represent Catalan identity to the global community that would visit during the summer, this worked to solidify patriotism within the region but also to establish Barcelona as a tourist destination, with a rhythm and culture different from Madrid.³⁰

The stadium that was built for the athletic competitions is located on Montjuïc hill, neighboring MNAC, the region’s most grandiose art museum formed in 1990 from the fusion of modern and historic public collections and housed in the Palau Nacional. The inauguration ceremony for the Games of the XXV Olympiad were held in the Sala Oval of the Palau Nacional, a stunning, classical hall with an elliptical cupola in the center of the museum. The space, originally designed in 1924 and completed for the 1929 International Exposition, began renovations in 1990 in preparation for the upcoming Olympics. Tàpies was solicited to create an artwork for the Palau Nacional, the idea being that a contemporary piece would compliment the ornate decor of the room while simultaneously presenting Barcelona as a sophisticated center of cultural production. What seems like a straightforward commission on behalf of MNAC’s directors, quickly snowballed into a media frenzy of critiques of Tàpies’s proposal for the new work: an enormous sock, measuring eighteen meters in height (1991, figures 41 and 42). *Mitjó* [Sock] became incredibly notorious before it was ever made.

In the library of the Fundació Antoni Tàpies, there is a white cardboard box that contains a stack of approximately twenty centimeters of photocopied newspaper clippings. Each one is about *Mitjó*. The articles, published in the final months of 1991 and in 1992 (the majority between January and March), range from local daily papers in Spain to foreign periodicals like

²⁷ Ibid., Kindle loc. 115.

²⁸ Helen Graham and Antonio Sanchez, “The Politics of 1992,” *Spanish Cultural Studies*, 411.

²⁹ Ferran Brunet i Cid, “The economic impact of the Barcelona Olympics Games, 1986-2004,” Centre d’Estudis Olímpics, 2002, accessed September 1, 2015, http://olympicstudies.uab.es/pdf/wp084_eng.pdf.

³⁰ Dowling, *Catalonia Since the Spanish Civil War*, 138.

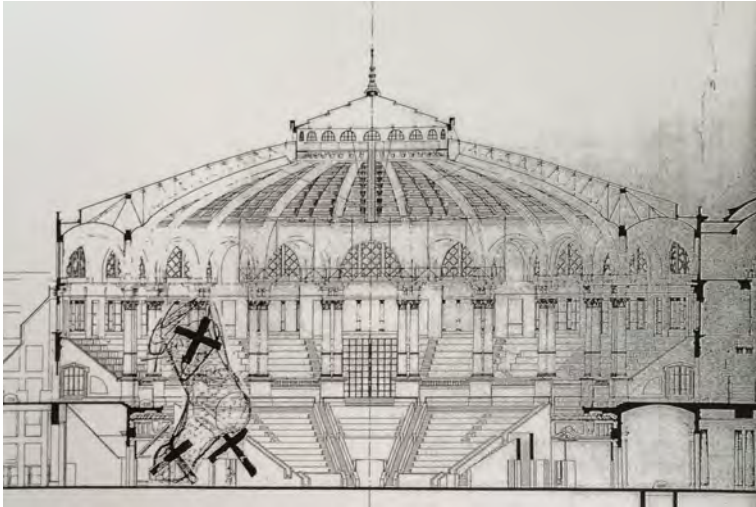


Figure 41- Antoni Tàpies, Model for *Mitjó*, 1991 (left)

Figure 42- Antoni Tàpies, Sketch of *Mitjó*, 1991 (right)

The New York Times and *The Wall Street Journal*. A few memorable titles include: “Does Barcelona Really Want a Statue of a Sock, With a Hole?” in Marseille’s *Herald Tribune*, “*Oda al calcetín*” [Ode to the Sock] in Barcelona’s *El Periódico*, and “*Poesia sobre el mitjó*” [Poetry about the Sock] in Barcelona’s *Avui*. The quantity of articles about the unmade sock is tremendous and newspapers from every one of Spain’s seventeen autonomous communities all reported on the debate at least once.

Beyond opinion pieces and news concerning the status of the controversy, several cartoons poke fun at the idea of an old, tattered sock constituting a work of art. Girona’s *Punt Diari* printed a picture of a nude bulb-shaped figure, with an enormous nose and bulging eyes, sitting on a chair while pulling up his sock; upon realizing that the sock has been worn through, leaving his toes exposed, the blob exclaims with excitement: “Wow! A Tàpies!” (figure 43).³¹ *Avui* printed a cartoon of two unshaven men standing next to a pair of garbage cans; while digging in the trash, holding up two dirty, smelly socks and looking back to his companion one announces: “We’re rich!!!!... I found two Tàpies!!” (figure 44).³² The Catalan nationalist papers *Punt Diari* and *Avui*’s drawings address the surface of an argument that an old sock could be

³¹ Joan Antoni Poch, *Punt Diari*, Girona, January 26, 1992. Signed “JAP” on the lower right.

³² Unknown artist, *Avui*, Barcelona, January 26, 1992. Signed “Fer” on lower left.



Figure 43- Joan Antoni Poch, Drawing published in *Punt Diari*, Girona, January 26, 1992 (left)

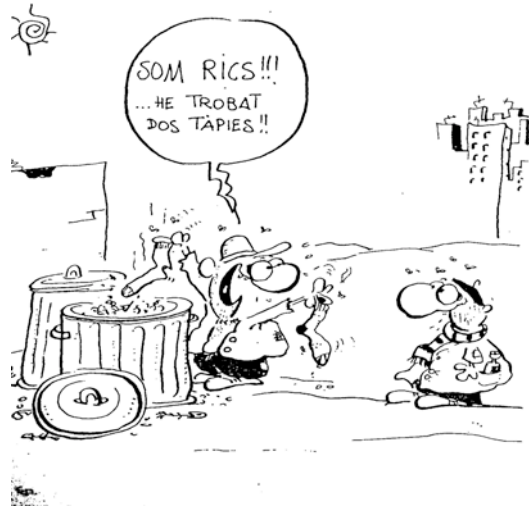


Figure 44- Unknown, Drawing published in *Avui*, Barcelona, January 26, 1992 (right)

found in the trash or even on your own foot; therefore the sock cannot be considered a serious work of art. However, these laughable images ultimately reinforce the notion that art is supposed to be something else: beautiful, balanced, expensive, meticulous, etc. If all artists shared this conservative thought that art should possess particular qualities, Doménikos Theotokópoulos, also known as El Greco, would not have painted his spectacularly emotive figures, nor de Kooning his terrifyingly impactful women. When asked about the *Mitjó* project, Tàpies once responded comically “do you wear socks?”³³

In March of 1992, a journalist for *La Vanguardia*, Jaime Gustà Hernández, stated that the “avalanche” of unfavorable opinions concerning Tàpies’s proposed sock sculpture was causing panic amongst local politicians.³⁴ A three month long onslaught of criticism of the project came from art professionals, celebrities, politicians, and the general population. Comments about *Mitjó* ranged from mild statements of disapproval, such as the Partido Popular’s (PP) spokesman in the Ajuntament de Barcelona Albert Fernández Díaz’s claim that the work possesses a “doubtful

³³ Antoni Tàpies, *El tatuaje y el cuerpo...*

³⁴ Jaime Gustà Hernández, “El calectín de Tàpies,” *La Vanguardia*, March 18, 1992, 20.

aesthetic,” to bold and unforgiving denunciations.³⁵ Several Barcelona periodicals published opinion letters sent to them from everyday readers. For example, Maria Sala wrote to *El Periódico* explaining that *Mitjó* would remind Spaniards of the times that they had to mend sock, instead of buying new pairs, for the whole family. Furthermore, Sala believed that foreigners, upon seeing the sock during the Olympic Games, would return to saying “Spain is different.”³⁶ This is an ironic interpretation of the hypothetical international audience’s reaction because the Franco regime used this slogan to promote the idea of Spain as an “exotic and passionate” country and Tàpies would not have wanted to support the dictator’s ideological maneuvers.³⁷ Abraham Méndez Ramos, in a letter to *El Observador*, mockingly wondered if the sock is for the



Figure 45- Menú Diari Gran Colmado, Barcelona, June 17, 1992

left or right foot, if it is of an Olympic athlete and if so what sport they compete in. He went on to discuss his “profound” thought that went into considering the work of art.³⁸ One irate citizen went beyond denouncing the commission and voiced his discontent of several of the artist’s projects. Yves Rus wrote to *El Periódico*, “The Fundació Tàpies, always empty, did not need a punk hairdo made of metal. Picasso did not need wet scraps of a container left on the street that marks his name. And the art museum does not need an old, white sock that would prove irresistible to our justified tomatoes.” In a mere few lines, Rus attacked the foundation itself, *Núvol i cadira*, *Monument Homenatge a Picasso*, and *Mitjó* and suggests that he is not alone in his desire to ridicule the sock, stating that others would also throw rotten tomatoes at it.

The restaurant Gran Colmado in Barcelona playfully included in their daily menu a raffle with a simple survey concerning the sculpture. Patrons were asked if they thought that *Mitjó* ought to be in the Saló Oval of MNAC (figure 45). The questionnaire included two boxes “si” and “no” with space to leave your name, address, and

³⁵ “El PP s’oposa a la instal·lació del mitjó de Tàpies al Palau Nacional,” *Avui*, January 28, 1992.

³⁶ Maria Sala, “El calcetín de Tàpies,” *El Periódico*, February 18, 1992.

³⁷ Alejandro Quiroga, *Goles y banderas. Fútbol e identidades nacionales en España* (Madrid: Marcial Pons Historia, 2014), 71.

³⁸ Abraham Méndez Ramos, “En torno a un ‘calcetín,’” *El Observador*, March 7, 1992.

phone number for the drawing of two gourmet meals. Gran Colmado reported to have collected over 1,000 responses, the majority voting against the artwork's installation in the Palau Nacional.³⁹

Nevertheless, solid arguments were made in favor of continuing the project. *Diari de Barcelona* published an article titled “*Visca el mitjó!*” that reminded readers of the line of people waiting to see Picasso's first post-war exhibition in Spain at the Sala Gaspar in 1955 and confrontationally questioned if the citizens of 1950s Barcelona were more open to contemporary art than those of the “city of miracles of '92.”⁴⁰ The article continued on to support Tàpies's work, claiming that the PP's opposition of *Mitjó* is in itself a reason to back the artwork.

In light of the wide range of public opinion concerning the commission, in January of 1992 MNAC's patrons under the leadership of Pere Duran i Farell, prudently decided not to make any official decisions until both the Ajuntament and the Generalitat submitted written documents in favor or in opposition of the artwork. MNAC's President of the board of trustees Duran i Farell stated that he should not make decisions about the sculpture “because it has to do with Barcelona '92, and will end up being a political and societal act.”⁴¹ The Vice President of MNAC's board, Ramon Guardans, had no problem stating his opposition, creating a schism within the museum's inner circle.⁴² The Mayor of Barcelona, Pasqual Maragall, was in favor of the commission. He stated that adding a grand work of art by Tàpies to the empty hall seemed like a wonderful idea, and that he is the “only indisputable artist that we have to do it.”⁴³ Oriol Bohigas i Guardiola, Councilor of Culture of the Ajuntament de Barcelona, architect, urban planner, and independent member of the PSC, agreed with Maragall's opinion concerning the sculpture yet refused to submit a written report for MNAC's board. Both Maragall and Bohigas positioned themselves in the debate affirming their support of the Tàpies project, but they decided to keep the Ajuntament officially neutral, advocating that the decision should be left solely to MNAC. Secretary of the PSC and candidate for the presidency of the Generalitat Raimon Obiols met with Maragall to discuss the artwork yet each maintained separate positions. Obiols stated that he was completely against the sculpture and joked that he himself was wearing

³⁹ “Un restaurante crea una encuesta-sorteo sobre el ‘calcetín’ de Antoni Tàpies,” *El País*, June 18, 1992. See also: Ramon Alberch “Un menú diario en el Archivo Histórico,” *El Periódico*, June 24, 1992.

⁴⁰ Àtremis, “Visca el mitjó,” *Diari de Barcelona*, February 11, 1992.

⁴¹ Rosario Fontova, “La sala oval del Palau Nacional se abrirá en el 92,” *El Periódico*, December 17, 1991.

⁴² Josep Massot, “El vicepresidente del MNAC se opone a la escultura del calcetín,” *La Vanguardia*, January 23, 1992. “La Generalitat ‘pide’ consejo sobre una obra de Tàpies,” *Segre*, January 25, 1992.

⁴³ “Maragall no intervendrá en la decisión sobre el ‘calcetín’ de Tàpies,” *El País*, February 8, 1992.

two “Tàpies,” one on each foot.⁴⁴ Joan Guitart, the Generalitat’s Councilor of Culture and member of the CDC, commented to *El País* (in reaction to Maragall’s announcement of his support of *Mitjó*) that the Generalitat would seek the advice of professionals and that he would not base any political decision on his personal preferences.

On February 6, 1992 Guitart proposed finding another location “more appropriate” to put Tàpies’s creation, signifying the Generalitat’s ‘no’ position in the debate.⁴⁵ The following day, *La Vanguardia* published a cartoon of a middle aged man with round glasses and a smug look on his face standing in front of the model of *Mitjó* and next to a grumpy representation of Tàpies with wiry, untamed hair. The man, a caricature of Guitart, tells the artist “you are the best, your hairdo is wonderful, but we have to think of another place for your artwork.” Meanwhile, the sly, slender Guitart is thinking that the sock ought to be sent to the middle of snow-laden Siberia (figure 46).⁴⁶ Art historian and the first president of the Fundació Miró, Francesc Vicens, criticized Guitart’s department for their disapproval of the project in an article published in *La*



Figure 46- Unknown, Drawing published in *La Vanguardia*, Barcelona, February 7, 1992

⁴⁴ “A Obiols no le gusta el calectín,” *Segre*, February 8, 1992.

⁴⁵ “La Generalitat se opone al calcetín de Tàpies,” *La Vanguardia*, February 6, 1992. Guitart later became President of MNAC’s board (1996-2004).

⁴⁶ Unknown artist, *La Vanguardia*, Barcelona, February 7, 1992.

Vanguardia. He reminded readers that the decision was “in theory” that of the museum, MNAC did not need to consult the Generalitat to install a new work of art, and Guitart could not veto *Mitjó*. Furthermore, Vicens stated that the artwork would “help to dignify” the space, which had been neglected since 1929 and was finally under restoration, “which ought to satisfy all Catalans.”⁴⁷ Jordi Solé Tura, Spanish Minister of Culture and member of the PSC, characterized the problem as a clash between creative liberty and public funding; adding that “personally, Tàpies’s sock, doesn’t particularly enthuse me.”⁴⁸ The heated debate concerning Tàpies’s proposal continued through the first months of 1992.

On February 26th MNAC announced that they would not make any decisions until after the local elections, that would be celebrated on March 15th. Under normal circumstances, the board meetings were held on the first Tuesday of every month, however Duran i Farell did not want partisan interests to sway the decision about *Mitjó*.⁴⁹

While MNAC’s board stalled the decision concerning the controversial commission as members of the board came from both the local and regional governing institutions and could not come to an agreement on the issues, the Ajuntament de Barcelona decided to award Tàpies with a gold medal of the city. On February 29, the press released that Tàpies would be recognized the following Tuesday (March 3rd) for his dedication to art, his generosity in strengthening Barcelona’s cultural activity, and his unwavering defense of democratic values and human rights.⁵⁰ While the Ajuntament did not submit an official report to MNAC in favor or against the *Mitjó* project, honoring the artist at this moment in time is indicative of the city government’s stance. Furthermore, the date in which the medal would be awarded is, coincidentally or not, the first Tuesday of the month. MNAC would have been meeting about *Mitjó* on this occasion, had Duran i Farell not decided to change the date due to upcoming elections.

Guitart recalled how the incident played out in a conversation with me. He remembered that with “much” consensus between both MNAC’s board and directors, that it was not the right moment to carry out the project, and that after construction was completed in the Sala Oval they could rethink it. He said that he had to communicate this decision to Tàpies, emphasizing that it

⁴⁷ “Vicens: Guitart no puede vetar el calcetín,” *La Vanguardia*, February 7, 1992.

⁴⁸ Rafael Villabona, “Solé Tura: ‘El ‘calcetín de Tàpies’ no me entusiasma demasiado,” *El Observador*, February 5, 1992.

⁴⁹ “El MNAC no decidirá sobre el ‘calcetín de Tàpies hasta después de las elecciones,” *El País*, February 25, 1992.

⁵⁰ “El Ayuntamiento de Barcelona concede a Antoni Tàpies la medalla de oro de la ciudad,” *El País*, February 29, 1992.

was not a political choice but a circumstantial one. He expressed that “some people and media sources did interpret it as a political decision,” yet he did not see it as such.⁵¹ Finally, he expressed that the work of politicians does not include the critiquing of art.

Pepe Serra, Director of MNCAC since 2011, recalled the “totally ridiculous polemic,” though he was in his mid-twenties at the time and just finishing his studies. He told me that the politicians, although they have to regulate public space, ought not to dictate over artistic style, as it is unjust for the artist.⁵² He compared the *Mitjó* debate to a current issue concerning the renovation of the facade of the Gran Teatre del Liceu, an opera house built in the nineteenth century in need of restoration. The project’s proposal includes the architect Frederic Amat’s vision, which has provoked much debate both amongst politicians and the general public. One report went as far as calling the conflict a “war” within the Ajuntament.⁵³ *Mitjó* was not the first, nor was it the last artwork that would cause politicians to become involved in artistic projects in Catalonia. As much as Guitart defended the fact that the MNAC’s decision was circumstantial, politics and politicians were undeniably involved in this battle between government and artistic expression.

On April 23, 1992 Duran i Farell publically spoke about the status of the renovations of the Palau Nacional. In a brief statement he highlighted his main concerns dealing with the financial future of the restorations. He explained that MNAC’s first priority was to raise funds, then, they would see about whether or not Tàpies’s *Mitjó* would fit into the plan. He addressed the overwhelming amount of attention the work was receiving and stated that debating about it is positive. However, he reiterated that the patrons of MNAC have more pressing priorities at the moment, like preparing for the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games.⁵⁴

On July 22, 1992 *The Wall Street Journal* published an article titled “Mr. Tàpies’s Unmatched Sock.” Comically introducing the abundance of athletes in attendance of the international competition in Barcelona but the lack of one infamous athletic sock, reporter Lee Lescaze reviewed the history of the still unmade *Mitjó*. While the refurbishment of the Sala Oval was completed in time for the Summer Olympics, the hall was left void of any contrasting,

⁵¹ Interview with Joan Guitart, July 12, 2016.

⁵² Interview with Pepe Serra, June 27, 2016.

⁵³ María Jesús Cañizares, “Guerra en el ayuntamiento por la nueva fachada del Liceu,” *Crónica*, March 31, 2016, accessed July 15, 2016, <http://www.cronicaglobal.com/es/notices/2016/03/guerra-en-el-ayuntamiento-por-la-nueva-fachada-del-liceu-35846.php>.

⁵⁴ “Duran: ‘Que hi hagi mitjó no és decisiu pel museu,’” *Diari de Barcelona*, April 23, 1992.

contemporary work of art. For months, Tàpies and his sock were both attacked and defended in the local and international media without much official resolve. Lescaze's take on the controversy was positive. He praised the productivity of this sort of public discussion, characterizing it as a "stimulating" and a "mark of civilization," concluding that in Barcelona "a faith in the importance and power of art is alive and well."⁵⁵

After the conclusion of the Olympic Games, MNAC's Director, Xavier Barral, also spoke about the positive side of debating about art. Barral, speaking specifically about *Mitjó*, said "it has been beneficial for MNAC, a lot of people did not even know we [the museum] existed [before]."⁵⁶ The topic began to draw less media attention after the closing ceremony of the Olympics. Over a year went by before any substantial news concerning the project surfaced once again. In December 1993, the new President of MNAC's board, former Vice President Ramon Guardans, stated that Tàpies's sock "will not be installed as long as I am president."⁵⁷ Guardans spoke specifically about his opposition of the work that would take up much space in the Sala Oval. He did not address the prospect of locating the artwork in another part of the building.

Talk of *Mitjó* lasted two years, before Guardans seemed to bury the topic with his firm and patronizing statement. Politics, personal preferences, and financial shortcomings all played a part in the failure of MNAC's initiative to commission a contemporary artwork for the Palau Nacional in time for the Olympic Games. The museum's directors and board of trustees handled the situation in a way that benefitted their publicity. Drawing out the decision-making processes, stalling it during local elections, involving political institutions that did not need to be involved, and leaving the project unsolved for more than a year gained exposure for the museum, both positive and negative. Tàpies, likewise, became the focus of much attention due to the controversy. Negatively, for those who chose to publically mock and denounce his art and positively, for those who supported the sock and valued his professional career.

I asked Toni Tàpies if he remembered how his father felt concerning the whole *Mitjó* episode. Without hesitation, he recalled:

⁵⁵ Lee Lescaze, "Mr. Tàpies's Unmatched Sock," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 22, 1992, A10.

⁵⁶ "Barral dice que la poémica del calcetín beneficia al MNAC," *La Vanguardia*, September 10, 1992. Over 142,000 people visited the Sala Oval of the museum that summer.

⁵⁷ "Tàpies, descalzo," *ABC de las artes*, December 1993 n. 90, accessed September 9, 2015, <http://hemeroteca.abc.es/nav/Navigate.exe/hemeroteca/madrid/cultural/1994/02/04/024.html>

The worst he felt since the moment that MNAC asked him to make a project for the Sala Oval, and when he presented his small model (which still exists, the sock) was when someone from MNAC said that they had not asked Tàpies to make anything, that he made the model because he wanted to, and the project ended there. If he made something it was because they asked him to make something, not because he had the idea of doing something there, it is absurd. He felt bad about this because it seemed like someone said that he was presenting a project that nobody sought him out to do, and that is not true. Later I think he became a little entertained reading the number of stories that were printed in newspapers, the majority were ridiculous, that in a way show the cultural and artistic level of this country, when in other countries this sort of project would be something normal that nobody would remark about to such an extent, here it turned into a hot topic of the press, the television, they made jokes and published caricatures.⁵⁸

We continued discussing how public art is often controversial and the inevitability of its criticism. However, in this particular instance newspaper articles concerning the infamous sock reached a point of ludicrousness. He explained “...they ended up saying true barbarities. Public sculptures are always going to be polemic, but the debate that occurred here with *Mitjó* was with extremely low levels of artistic analysis.”⁵⁹ The contents of that large box in the Fundació Antoni Tàpies filled with a giant stack of photocopied articles from the press includes innumerable opinions, however, the majority of which are satirical, only addressing the surface level aesthetic of Tàpies’s sculptural proposal for MNAC.

The *Mitjó* debacle is an example of a direct relationship between art and politics, a theme this chapter will continue to elaborate on. What was initially a straightforward artistic commission turned into a media hyped debate spilling into the public sphere. Politicians, who held no credentials in aesthetics or art, made public statements that affected the project’s outcome. It is not surprising that the Ajuntament supported the vanguard, nontraditional work while the Generalitat decided against it. The nontraditional sculpture would have fit with Pasqual Maragall and the PSC’s narrative about Barcelona’s modernity. Embracing the sock aligned with the sort of urban fabric that the Ajuntament was working to create, and *Mitjó* would have become a symbol of that era. On the other hand, the project clashed with the Generalitat and CiU’s vision of Catalan culture. The plan was too transgressive, despite the regional government’s endorsement of other works by Tàpies, particularly those that work to reinforce

⁵⁸ Interview with Toni Tàpies, February 4, 2016.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Catalan nationalist narratives and myths. Comical drawings published in *Avui* and *Punt Diari* echoed the Generalitat's stance, poking fun at the artist, and ultimately disparaging *Mitjó*.

If the artist had proposed to create a giant *barretina* instead of a sock, would the Generalitat have approved of the commission for its nationalist representation?⁶⁰ It is both beneficial and productive to criticize and debate about art. Unfortunately, politicians contributed to the prohibition of *Mitjó* and Tàpies never created the final version. The sculpture was never criticized in its genuine form in its intended space. Furthermore, Tàpies's credibility as an artist was put under the microscope and local newspapers became active participants in the publicized debate, publishing not only news but opinion pieces from readers and comics. Although Guardans squashed the prospect of Tàpies creating the full sized sculpture for the Sala Oval, the next chapter will reveal the final location of the mythical *Mitjó*. Despite the obstacles of the project from 1992 to 1993, it was never totally buried nor made and shipped to Siberia.

Rinzen (1993, figure 47) is the title of an artwork that means “a sudden awakening” in Japanese. Tàpies made the combination of sculpture and painting for the Spanish Pavilion at the 45th Venice Biennale and was presented with the Golden Lion Award for painting, along with American artist Richard Hamilton. *Rinzen* is meant to condemn war, specifically the Bosnian War. However, the artwork is illegible without the artist's statement and historical context in which it was first shown. None of the formal elements point out the horrors of the indiscriminate bombing, ethnic cleansing, and systematic raping of women in Bosnia. However, Tàpies confirmed that *Rinzen* is meant to be an antiwar vision created in response to the first year of the Bosnian War, which began in April 1992. *ABC* published a brief interview with Tàpies just before the Biennale opened. Tàpies dramatically stated his distaste for realism, claiming that the style is shallow and glib. His intentions as an artist, as he sought to demonstrate with *Rinzen*, had to do with “studying reality more profoundly, without dwelling on the surface of things.”⁶¹ Not only did this interview seek to justify Tàpies's unique style, it simultaneously created friction between a handful of popular realist painters from Spain such as Antonio López, whose headshots were printed alongside that of Tàpies in the newspaper.

⁶⁰ For the arbitrary nature of national symbols, see: Ozkirimli, *Contemporary Debates On Nationalism*, 188.

⁶¹ “Antoni Tàpies abofeta al realismo: ‘Es pintura facilona para nuevos ricos,’” *ABC*, June 11, 1993, 12.



Figure 47- Antoni Tàpies, *Rinzen*, 1993, MACBA

In 1998, Barcelona’s contemporary art museum MACBA permanently installed the award-winning *Rinzen*. In the foyer of the entrance and rising up to the first floor, a large bed hangs diagonally below three numbers “1 2 3” painted on the wall. Brown wood, rectangular frames, black netting, woolen blankets, and white pillows hang off the bed as gravity pulls them towards the floor. Opposite from the iron bedframe, hanging on the wall of the first floor gallery is a monochromatic painting, heavily textured and similar to Tàpies’s Matter Paintings from the 1950s. A large glass window and door separates the two interior elements from the remainder of the work outside. From the inside, beholders can make out the title of the work painted on the adjacent wall of the exterior patio in black spray paint “*Rinzen*,” which is emphasized with a rectangle around the letters and Tàpies’s “+” marking boldly painted towards the upper left of the title. Two rows of five folding chairs are neatly organized as in a classroom. A metal strip snakes itself about the chairs, creating a physical connection between them. An eleventh chair

sits away from the group, in the opposite direction, like an exile facing the wall. The artwork, modified in order to accommodate MACBA's space, is meant to lead viewers to a "deeper understanding of reality."⁶² Does Tàpies's *Rinzen* accomplish this difficult task? The answer to this question is subjective and certainly depends on the emotions, memories, and experiences of the beholder.

After its exhibition at the Venice Biennale, Repsol purchased *Rinzen* for 70 million pesetas, more than 420,000 euros.⁶³ In 1997 the Spanish government sold their last ten percent of the partially privatized company, finalizing the privatization of Repsol. On December 17, 1998 the global energy company officially 'donated' the artwork to MACBA. Alfonso Cortina, the president of Repsol, attended the act along with the artist. Also present were: MACBA's Director Manuel Borja-Villel and President Leopoldo Rodés, the Mayor of Barcelona Joan Clos, and the Minister of Culture of the Generalitat Joan Maria Pujas.⁶⁴ Shortly after, the Sevilla edition of *ABC* published a full page with an image of the artwork, announcing Repsol's grand gesture.⁶⁵ The donation effectively relieved Repsol from paying a portion of their taxes, making *Rinzen* property of the state, not the museum. This is a popular model that large companies in the United States also use to 'patronize' the arts and lessen their tax burden.

After unveiling *Rinzen* at the Venice Biennale, and before its permanent installation in MACBA, Tàpies continued to work on large-scale public works. In 1995 in the Barcelona suburb Sabadell, he presented a giant sculpture in the shape of a bell with a beam diagonally situated on top (figure 48). Tàpies reverses the relationship between the subject and strut of Classical sculptures, the latter serving as a means of physical support for the former. Ancient sculptors often added superfluous elements, such a tree trunk, to marble figures in order to reinforce the base. In the Sabadell sculpture, instead of the beam supporting the weight of the bell, the *bell* buttresses the more mundane element. Although the piece is similar to a church bell, Tàpies

⁶² MACBA Collection, accessed September 13, 2015, <http://www.macba.cat/en/rinzen-1461>.

⁶³ Catalina Serra, "El MACBA instala la pieza que Tàpies presentó en la Bienal de Venecia," *El País*, December 18, 1998, accessed September 14, 2015, http://elpais.com/diario/1998/12/18/cultura/913935604_850215.html.

⁶⁴ "Repsol dona a la Fundació Museo d'Art Contemporani la obra Rinzen, de Antoni Tàpies," Repsol press release, December 17, 1998, accessed September 14, 2015, http://www.repsol.com/es_es/corporacion/prensa/notas-de-prensa/ultimas-notas/donacion_de_la_obra_rinzen_a_la_fundacio.aspx.

⁶⁵ "Tàpies: 75 años de creación," *ABC* (Sevilla), December 20, 1998, 83, accessed June 13, 2016, <http://hemeroteca.abc.es/nav/Navigate.exe/hemeroteca/sevilla/abc.sevilla/1998/12/20/083.html>.



Figure 48- Antoni Tàpies, *Gran campana*, 1996, Sabadell

stated that his intentions were not religiously oriented, that the bell predates religion as a tool to warn communities of imminent danger.⁶⁶

The sculpture is located outside of the Sabadell's municipal art museum and is the first public work Tàpies made in Spain outside of Barcelona. When the sculpture was first installed in Sabadell, local media highlighted that Tàpies had turned down an opportunity to make a mural for Madrid's airport.⁶⁷ The artist refused a commission from the Ayuntamiento de Madrid, and donated a work to a community with far less international exposure in the same year. However, he made no comments concerning why he was uninterested in creating a mural for Barajas airport. In *Dictatorship, Workers, and the City: Labour in Greater Barcelona since 1939* Sebastian Balfour wrote about a general workers strike that took place in Sabadell in 1976. However, the act of resistance was about much more than concerns of working conditions and

⁶⁶ Jordi Bordes, "Sabadell, tercera ciutat d'Europa que té una escultura de Tàpies," *El 9 Nou*, June 17, 1995.

⁶⁷ Jordi Bordes, "Tàpies instal·la a Sabadell la seva primera obra fora de Barcelona," *El 9 Nou*, June 13, 1995; "Sabadell, tercera ciutat d'Europa que té una escultura de Tàpies."

wages. A series of protests were sparked by the decision of the mayor, Josep Marcet, not to consider a petition for amnesty for political prisoners and ensuing acts of police brutality in Sabadell. The workers strike advocated “for union and political freedom as a form of struggle against repression,” and they succeeded in taking down figures of power at the local level.⁶⁸ Perhaps the memory of these events, which Balfour characterized as a microcosm of what was going on at the state level, affected Tàpies’s decision to give Sabadell one of his works of art.⁶⁹ There is no documentation that expresses a direct connection here on behalf of Tàpies, though, at the presentation of the artwork, Universitat de Barcelona Professor Antoni Marí made a statement that could allude to a correlation between the artwork and the workers strike. Marí stated that the bell is like a shelter, one that brings together spirits in harmony, with liberty, and justice.⁷⁰ At the very least, Tàpies would have known about the events that took place in the Barcelona suburb during the transition to democracy in Spain.

Although the bell was presented as a gift, an economic exchange did take place. Tàpies donated the sculpture to the Ajuntament de Sabadell. Shortly after, the Mayor of Sabadell Antoni Farrés, member of the environmentalist and post-communist party Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds (ICV), made a donation on behalf of the Ajuntament de Sabadell to the Fundació Antoni Tàpies of 9 million *pesetas*, around 54,000 euros.⁷¹ While the sum did not amount to what private collectors may have paid for the work, it was still a substantial ‘donation.’

The bell in Sabadell is mute, although looking at it suggests the sound it would make if it were hanging properly from the beam instead of supporting its weight. The absence of sound is also an important component in the artist’s next major work, a meditation room for the Universitat Pompeu Fabra, a public university founded in 1990. In the center of Barcelona, Tàpies created a space that prohibits noise, in order to harbor reflection. The *Sala de reflexió* combines painting, sculpture, and installation to mold the interior of a useful place (1996, figure 49). A large mural with the symmetrical, curvy outline of a bell is centered on the back wall. To the left are five rows of five chairs, neatly hanging on the wall. Some of the chairs are moveable, although the third, fourth, and fifth rows are fixed to the wall and out of reach. To the right is a wooden cupboard, topped with an ordinary white plate and a coiled snake. The magazine *On*

⁶⁸ Balfour, *Dictatorship, Workers, and the City...*, 224-225.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁷⁰ Josep Ache, “Tàpies dóna a Sabadell un símbol,” *Diari de Sabadell*, June 17, 1995.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*



Figure 49- Antoni Tàpies, *Sala de reflexió*, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona (left)

Figure 50- Unknown, lararium in Pompeii's *Casa dei Vettii*, 62-79 AD (right)

wrote that the snake has clear biblical references, however, as Tàpies was agnostic, the snake is more likely to reference a different sort of spiritual symbol.⁷² In ancient Pompeii and Herculaneum, households of all social classes had shrine-like altars that functioned as part of ritual ceremonies to protect the domestic realm. These *lararia* were composed of architectural elements generally framing a painting. The pictures often included snakes; a fine example exists in the ruins of the atrium of the *Casa dei Vettii* in Pompeii (figure 50). Snakes were an important protective symbol in the home. While the best-preserved examples are in Italy, there has been evidence of similar images in Northern Africa and the Iberian Peninsula, also predating biblical references to snakes.⁷³ The coiled snake in Tàpies's sculpture, in the context of a quiet retreat made for thinking, seems closely related to the safeguarding function of the snakes in ancient domestic *lararia*. Furthermore, the *Sala de reflexió* is a purposefully non-denominational. It imitates the Rothko Chapel in Houston, Texas designed in 1971 as a meditative space, an

⁷² "Sala de Reflexión en la Universidad Pompeu Fabra," *On* (Barcelona), 1997 num. 180, 95.

⁷³ George K. Boyce, "Significance of the Serpents on Pompeian House Shrines," *American Journal of Archaeology* 46 (1942).

“intimate sanctuary available to people of every belief.”⁷⁴ Lined with Mark Rothko’s murals, the inviting interior provides an environment that is rarely found in the urban fabric. It is a quiet, calm sphere dedicated to the intellectual and emotional condition of the people who visit it. Similarly, Universitat Pompeu Fabra’s *Sala de reflexió* aims to achieve a spiritual aura free from religious connotations.

Tàpies expressed his objectives of the project, highlighting the unnatural, accelerating rhythm and pace of life that he thought necessitated a counterbalance:

Faced with the excesses of bustle, mental dispersion and the innumerable cults to false realities to which we are subjected in present-day societies, it seems to me very opportune to contribute to the creation of a space and images which favor seclusion, concentration and, in short, a closer approximation to our real nature.⁷⁵

In the months following the completion of the work in September of 1996, the local media described it as a place to “concentrate and meditate, in the midst of the distortion of the contemporary world.”⁷⁶ The artwork inside the *Sala de reflexió*, instead of taking on the role of a spectacle on view in a museum, is not the primary focus of the visitors. The art is meant to provide an environment conducive to the individual’s needs for quiet contemplation. Tàpies thought that the space was ideal, as the overwhelming bustle of many museums has changed the way people experience works of art.⁷⁷ His project aimed for an emotive reaction that reverberates back to the people who visit, not the work of art itself. “Tàpies’s Chapel” was closed to the public shortly after its inauguration. As part of Pompeu Fabra’s 25th anniversary celebration, the *Sala de reflexió* reopened to the public in 2016, with an entrance fee of five euros that includes admission into both Tàpies’s room and another small gallery exhibiting additional artworks by Tàpies and Antonio Saura.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Rothko Chapel, accessed September 18, 2015, http://rothkochapel.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3&Itemid=6.

⁷⁵ “Sala de Reflexión en la Universidad Pompeu Fabra,” 95.

⁷⁶ Pilar Parcerisas, “Una cambra per al silenci,” *Avui*, February 6, 1997.

⁷⁷ Llätzer Moix, “Tàpies reivindica el arte como vehículo de reflexión en su monumental obra para la UPF,” *La Vanguardia*, December 6, 1996, accessed June 9, 2016, <http://hemeroteca.lavanguardia.com/preview/1996/07/28/pagina-41/33957519/pdf.html?search=Sala%20de%20Reflexi%C3%B3n%20T%C3%A0pies>.

⁷⁸ David Palacios, “En el interior de la capilla laica de Tàpies,” *La Vanguardia*, June 5, 2016, accessed June 9, 2016, <http://www.lavanguardia.com/local/barcelona/20160602/402225411601/capilla-laica-tapies-upf-reflexion.html>.

As journalist Xavier Barral i Altet wrote in *Avui* about the space, art is only valuable when it is integrated in life.⁷⁹ Art cannot be both valuable and detached from society. Tàpies was aware of this and sought to create involved works that have a real social function. He designed the *Sala de reflexió* for Pompeu Fabra, a public university that seeks to uphold “the principles of freedom, democracy, justice, equality, independence, and plurality.”⁸⁰ The meditation room that he created for the newly established school did not include any overt references to one of his most commonly addressed themes: Catalan history and identity. Pompeu Fabra is not a historical institution and its aims are to embrace plurality, although the school is named after one of the most important figures in the history of the Catalan language, Pompeu Fabra i Poch.⁸¹ Accordingly, Tàpies left out references to any one particular national identity. However, CiU created the school as an elite university, using a name that recapitulated a strategy of nationalization seeking to link the present with figures from the past. While the *Sala de reflexió* does not look much like Tàpies’s works for the Generalitat, the project was tied to CiU. The following chapter will elaborate on works that do focus on the subject of Catalonia and Catalan identity, and it includes an analysis of the direct relationship between art and politics in both public and non-public works of art.

4.3 Concluding Remarks

A single, simple cartoon captures many of themes outlined in this chapter. Public funding, politics, time, and space are all addressed in Jaume Perich Escala’s (known as “El Perich”) witty drawing (figure 51).⁸² A stout, dumfounded man stands in front of a map with the title “How to circulate Barcelona.” The chart is one ridiculous, squiggly line that transverses from the upper right to the lower left in an abundant series of loops. Below the title, it says that it is a design made by Antoni Tàpies and in parenthesis sponsored by the Ajuntament de Barcelona. This

⁷⁹ Xavier Barral i Altet, “Coherència tapiana,” *Avui*, January 7, 1997.

⁸⁰ “A Brief History of a Young University,” Universitat Pompeu Fabra, accessed June 19, 2016, <https://www.upf.edu/universitat/en/presentacio/historia.html>.

⁸¹ In 1904 he published *Tractat de ortografia catalana* which outlines the standards of modern Catalan orthography and in 1911 he wrote a book on Catalan grammar in Spanish titled *Qüestions de gramàtica catalana*.

⁸² This image, along with several thousand more of Perich’s works, pertains to the Arxiu Municipal de Barcelona. It has no specified publication or date. However, considering its reference to Tàpies’s 1990 spiral sculpture *Núvol i cadira* and Perich’s 1995 death, the drawing must date to the early 1990s.

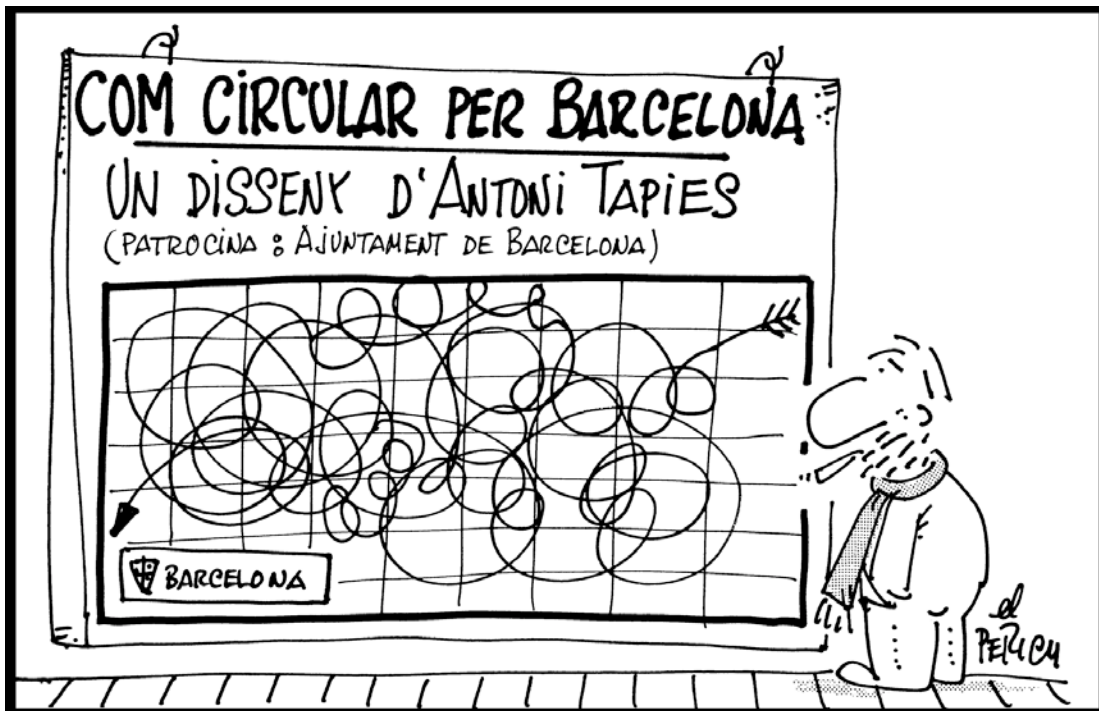


Figure 51- Jaume Perich Escala, Drawing with title “Com circular per Barcelona,” circa 1990-1995, Arxiu Municipal de Barcelona

laughable image plays with a number of ideas starting with the practicality of the artist’s work. The map recalls the metal coils of his *Núvol i cadira* sculpture that crowns the building of his foundation. It also suggests the non-traditional or even non-practical tendency of the artist, as a normal map would show visitors a rational route through the city. The title and subtitles are written in Catalan and point out the Ajuntament’s support of the artist. In a way, the cartoon is as ambiguous as some of Tàpies’s Matter Paintings. Perich, in acknowledging Tàpies’s idiosyncrasy and the local government’s patronage of the artist, perpetuates his prominence while simultaneously poking fun at him. A more sardonic interpretation, on the other hand, could consider the cartoon as a critique of the Ajuntament’s prudence, efficiency, and public spending. Although Tàpies’s body of work engaged with international artistic tendencies and exhibited avant-garde techniques, it was also inextricably tied to the local institutions that supported him,

critics that criticized him, cartoonists that poked fun at him, and Catalan compatriots that backed him.⁸³

The Generalitat de Catalunya financially supported Tàpies throughout the 1990s and continues to make annual contributions to the foundation today. While the institution did not back the installation of *Mitjó* in the Palau Nacional, it is the body that has provided the most financial aid for the Fundació Antoni Tàpies. The Ajuntament de Barcelona has also played a major role in funding the artist and his projects. Through extension, both CiU and PSC significantly bolstered Tàpies's professional career despite their ideological differences. Without the support of the most influential political institutions in Catalonia, Tàpies's exposure, repertoire, and legacy would have been reduced considerably.

Each of these two institutions maintained very different relationships with the artist. The Generalitat supported the Tàpies's nationalist representations, using some of these compositions to promote a Catalan nationalist narrative linked to historic civilizations. The Ajuntament, on the other hand, sought to present cutting-edge works in order to promote Barcelona's image as a cosmopolitan center with a progressive cityscape. This distinction became most evident in the Ajuntament's approval of the proposed *Mitjó* project and the Generalitat's hesitation and final disapproval. This debate demonstrates much about the dynamic between art and politics. While a sizeable piece of gaudy red-and-yellow striped cloth is acceptable and appropriate in just about any corner of Catalonia, the Generalitat did not see that a work of contemporary art by an internationally acclaimed artist was fit for the center of an art museum.

Whether or not he took up subjects that were Catalan or more instinctive and abstract, Tàpies continued to work the subversive style that he developed in the 1950s under the Franco regime. His decision to continue to create in this manner, decades after the dictator's death, is not particularly surprising. As journalist Luis Apostua pointed out in 1992, being an artist and anti-Francoist was a lucrative vocation. "Why wouldn't Tàpies make a living off of *antifranquismo*? It is a known, profitable enterprise."⁸⁴ The following chapter will discuss in greater detail some of Tàpies's compositions that directly reference Catalonia, unlike the old sock, and the ways in which visual material can substantiate the idea that a nation is a natural, fixed entity.

⁸³ Quotation marks are used in respect to Billig's ideas concerning how politics often address the national audience as such, creating an us/them divide that becomes null once the topic jumps from the national to the global level. For more see: Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism*.

⁸⁴ Apostua, "Calcetin con millones."



5 The Visualization of a Catalan Nation

This chapter considers how Tàpies represented the image of Catalonia through 2006, which directly links some of his most visible works of art to the realm of politics. These images have contributed to the representation of the idea of Catalonia as a real and valuable place, not an imagined nation. “The Visualization of a Catalan Nation” analyzes compositions that deal with national identity, contemporary issues, and historical commemoration. The first section examines the ways in which politics have affected the work of the artist, paying particular attention to the topic of Catalan nationalism and the various times associated with the idea of the nation. The following section includes a discussion about the direct links between Tàpies’s art and politics. The objective of this chapter is not to create an argument concerning Tàpies’s own identity and politics, but to expose the ways in which he formulated his images, many of which are associated with Catalonia.

5.1 Art, Nationalism, and Identity

As argued in the previous chapters, Tàpies established a style that remained constant throughout his long career. However, the subject matter of his artworks is not equally consistent. Catalan culture is a recurring and politically charged theme that he tended to work with. Returning to a pair of examples introduced prior to this chapter, this time focusing on their nationalist content, allows for a more nuanced analysis of the political implications of the artist’s work. The word “visualize” can mean forming a mental image, imagining, or making something visible to the eye.¹ “The visualization of a Catalan nation” has a double meaning. It is something that Tàpies created, making the idea of a national history and identity visible. It is simultaneously something that beholders imagine upon seeing some of his artworks. A closer look at artworks such as *Pintura romànica i barretina*, *Les quatre cròniques*, and the mural at the Universal Exposition in Sevilla illustrate the artist’s role in presenting and perpetuating ideas concerning the legitimacy of Catalonia’s nationhood and ‘its’ values and identity (figures 1, 4, and 40).

¹ Oxford Dictionaries, accessed September 21, 2015, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/visualize>.



Figure 52- Horatio Greenough, *George Washington*, 1840

A nation is an abstract idea. Nations do not exist without humans conceptualizing their citizens, borders, and organization. When an artist makes an artwork, a single image cannot wholly capture the idea of a unified ‘imagined’ community. However, they can represent concepts that perpetuate or transform the idea of the nation. A humorous example is Horatio Greenough’s 1840 sculpture of the first President of the United States, George Washington, posed in the manner of an ancient Greek god (figure 52). Seated in a chair, with a toga that only covers him from the waist down, Washington holds a sword in one hand and raises the other towards the sky. He is wearing sandals. Why did Greenough decide to depict the late president in this manner? He wanted to

emphasize the importance of freedom and democracy, aligning his central figure with a god of one of the most cultured civilizations of the ‘Western’ world. What does this absurd (in that Washington is entirely idealized and wearing clothing that seems ridiculous for Philadelphian climate) statue say about the United States? It glorifies its past, as the statue was made over a century after Washington’s birth, and it promotes the single most important ‘American’ value via a Latin inscription on the back that reads: “Horatio Greenough made this image as a great example of freedom, and will not survive without freedom itself.” The sculpture alludes to the victory over the British Empire and establishment of a free country. However, the statue fails to address that while American Revolutionaries won liberty from foreign rule, during Washington’s presidency Native Americans, slaves, and women were excluded from participating in the new ‘free’ state. Art, in this case, perpetuates the idea that the ‘Founding Fathers’ of the United States of America were the harbingers of freedom, giving them a heroic, divine status.

Art is also able to bring into question already established knowledge concerning the nation. For example, Peter Saul’s 1967 painting *Saigon* is a fierce critique of US policy during the Vietnam War (figure 53). Saul’s representation of American G.I.’s raping and torturing the family of the central figure, a Vietnamese girl labeled “innocent virgin,” is both appealing in its



Figure 53- Peter Saul, *Saigon*, 1967

bright colors and appalling in its content. Reiterating the action of the canvas is a phrase at the bottom, “white boys torturing and raping the people of Saigon: high class version.” This artwork condemns the behaviors of American soldiers, undercutting the notion that the United States military is a protective and valiant organization. Greenough and Saul’s works are two examples of how art participates in the conception of the nation, an idea that somehow manages to organize contemporary societies and individuals’ identities.

How is Tàpies’s artwork related to Catalan nationalism and identity? Remember that both nationalism and identity are not fixed terms, they can both change over time and through space. Furthermore, contrary to popular beliefs, nationalism is neither a natural phenomenon nor limited to extreme groups, such as fascists or separatists, as Michael Billig pointed out in *Banal Nationalism*.² Linking Tim Edensor’s idea that sensuality plays a significant role in the construction of national identity and Alejandro Quiroga’s elaboration on Fernando Molina’s “personalization” of the nation, it becomes clear that national identity and nationalism are bound

² Billig, *Banal Nationalism*.

to human emotion and personal experiences.³ Tàpies addressed the Catalan nation in three ways: verbally, via artworks that employ obvious symbols, colors, words, and names of local ‘heroes’ associated with Catalonia, and through his stylistic embodiment of these elements. The ways in which Tàpies has presented symbols like the stripes of the *senyera* or the date September 11th contribute to the emotional charge that these works of art carry. Furthermore, they aggrandize the fabricated concept that nations are unchanging, definable, and historically justified entities.

Tàpies’s artwork often takes up themes related to the Catalan nation, expressing both his own ideas concerning his national identity and representing nationalism visually, in space rather than time. The difference between Tàpies’s work and more bold examples such as *Saigon* is remarkable. Saul’s combination of flashy colors with shocking, cartoonish images makes the picture memorable. Once viewers allow their eyes to adjust to the shades of neon, they are left with a repulsive, disgraceful picture that remains imprinted in their memory. Tàpies’s work, on the other hand, often employs a more subtle approach to the transmission of national ideas. For example, *Pintura romànica i barretina* does not leave beholders with such a fierce sensation directly linked to the idea of the nation (figure 1). However, the image does reinforce the association between an everyday object, the red hat, and its iconographic significance in Catalonia. The international audience may not be aware that the representation of the *barretina* establishes two groups: ‘us’ and ‘them.’ That particular cap is linked to a host of meanings, but is primarily associated with considering oneself a Catalan. The extraordinary aspect of this picture is in its balance between the mundane and the revolutionary. Tàpies created *Pintura romànica i barretina* in 1971, during the late Franco dictatorship and during the same year as the first Assemblea de Catalunya. While the canvas does not depict a single, direct idea, Tàpies suggests themes that lead to a particular idea. The *barretina* is the most obvious symbol that deals with the concept of Catalan identity.⁴ The rope alludes to violence and intolerable yet ‘legal’ acts that the dictatorial regime committed after the war. The combination of the rope and hat forms a pendulum, showing time standing still. An anti-Francoist artist’s representation of Catalan identity, violence, and time during the early 1970s transmits a powerful message about the past and a hopeful one for the future. But Tàpies did not spell-out his ideas literally, as seen in *Saigon*.

³ Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*, 140; Quiroga, “The Three Spheres...” 693; Fernando Molina Aparicio, *Mario Onaindia (1948-2003): Biografía patria* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2012), 54.

⁴ The *barretina*, however, was also used under Francoism as a way of hailing regional traditions. See: Núñez Seixas, “La región y lo local en el primer franquismo,” 137; and *ABC*, March 23, 1974, accessed September 5, 2016, <http://hemeroteca.abc.es/nav/Navigate.exe/hemeroteca/madrid/abc/1974/04/23/001.html>.

Pintura romànica i barretina, particularly beyond the context of its 1970s debut, is closer to Billig's notion of a banal yet nationalist emblem.⁵ In *Banal Nationalism*, Billig showed how language contributes to a more natural acceptance of the world as logically divided into nations, where linguistically similar populations become unified under a single state. Catalonia is a peculiar case, where the 'national' language differs from that of the Kingdom of Spain. Further complicating the study of nationalism in Catalonia is the great spectrum, both historically and contemporaneously, of patriotic feelings under consideration. In Franco's Spain Catalan nationalist groups were fragmented, differing in their political objectives but united in their opposition to the regime.⁶ As Kathryn Crameri has expressed, "fragmentation has been a perpetual characteristic of Catalan separatism up to the present day."⁷ In twenty-first century Catalonia there are a host of different ways in which individuals have considered their Catalan identities with respect to that of the Spain. Some citizens of the region have seen their Catalan national identity as compatible with a Spanish identity, while others have felt indivisibly Catalan. Many individuals have felt more Catalan than Spanish and others more Spanish than Catalan, as has often been the case with immigrants living in Catalonia.⁸ There are many intermediary points where perceptions of their own individual identifications vary. However, each block has seemed to correlate with the population's desires for the future relation between Spain and Catalonia. For example, many of those who felt exclusively Catalan have advocated for an independent state whereas those who have opposed the independence movement often identified themselves, at least in part, as being Spanish. Nevertheless, the degree or nature of a citizen's national identification is unfixed, and can sway under in time or under diverse circumstances. Factors that contribute to the molding of national identities and therefore nationalism include, but are not limited to, the media, family life, experience abroad, education, and even sports.

Art, as a form of visual language, also shapes the way that national subjects conceive of themselves in respect to 'their' nation. This most often appears in Billig's realm of banal nationalism, a space where the very idea of the legitimacy of the national body goes unquestioned but is nevertheless constantly pulsating and structuring our notions of common

⁵ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 40-43.

⁶ Guibernau, *Catalan Nationalism*, 50-69.

⁷ Kathryn Crameri, *Goodbye Spain?: The Question of Independence for Catalonia* (East Sussex, England: Sussex Academic Press, 2014), Kindle loc. 525.

⁸ For more on these categories: Ivan Serrano, "Just a Matter of Identity? Support for Independence in Catalonia," *Regional & Federal Studies*, 23:5 (2013): 523-545.

knowledge.⁹ However, as Quiroga has pointed out, Billig's work does not get into the process of reception on behalf of individuals and the application of this theory in Catalonia does not seem to work.¹⁰ This may hold true in terms of overtly political signals like the *estelada*, as it clearly clashes with Spanish nationalism. However, artworks that address the Catalan nation in a subtler format can be understood in Billig's terms as banal beacons of nationalism.

In "Banal Catalanism?" Kathryn Crameri talked about Billig's theory, showing that through the 1979 acknowledgement of Catalonia's national status as a *nacionalidad histórica*, Catalan citizens stopped seeking to constantly justify the nation's existence, effectively shifting nationalism from "hot" to "banal."¹¹ Currently, artworks such as *Pintura romànica i barretina* work within the boundaries of national ideology, recapitulating the power of nations to structure contemporary thinking and strengthening the binary of us/them. While Billig's thesis may have worked in Catalonia since the central Spanish government approved the recognition of Catalonia as a nation, in 1971 when Tàpies made *Pintura romànica i barretina* the national question was a more contentious, delicate matter. It did not work *within* the boundaries of a legally recognized nation, but it did work to promote a differentiation between two politically unified yet culturally different groups.

The 'us,' in this case, is signified through the red hat, a symbol of Catalan identity employed as a marker to distinguish a difference between the 'them.' As the red hat is not an image with universal meaning, the 'them' that this canvas addresses is the rest of the Spanish population that does not consider themselves Catalan. The hanging position of the *barretina* victimizes the 'us' while simultaneously indicating the idea of time. In *Pintura romànica i barretina* time is static, frozen. The unmoving pendulum is awaiting a stimulus to begin anew. In the context of 1971, increased clandestine political activity and the desire for self-government in Catalonia could have been the spark that Tàpies saw that would instigate change. Meanwhile, he continued to work in his often discrete yet politically potent style. Tàpies frequently worked in a style that both demonstrated his anti-Francoist position *and* sought to glorify the history (including invented histories) of Catalonia.

⁹ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 8.

¹⁰ Alejandro Quiroga "Michael Billig en España. Sobre la recepción de Banal Nationalism," *Pensar con la Historia desde el siglo XXI* (Madrid: Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 2015), 4195.

¹¹ Kathryn Crameri, "Banal Catalanism?" *National Identities* 2 (2000: 145-157), 154-155.

Tàpies highlighted how important Catalonia was for him as an artist and intellectual in a 1990 BBC version of a documentary about him:

I've been greatly affected by the geography of my personal circumstances, by my family life, and my life in the city of Barcelona, and by my life in my country: Catalonia. From an early age I developed the habit of probing beneath the surface, of looking always for a deeper reality. I couldn't stop thinking about the moral dilemmas involved in the pursuit of such things as truth, justice, and honesty.¹²

The way in which Tàpies referred to his “country” is indicative of the emotional ties he had with the region. Here he voiced what some of his images point out: that he felt connected to Catalonia and that it formed part of his personal identity. While this identity is not always evident in every single work that he made, this statement demonstrates Tàpies’s awareness that time and place were defining aspects of his life.

Some of the Tàpies’s works fuse what Homi Bhabha coins as the “pedagogical” and “performative,” strategic elements that ultimately enable the ability of national myths to flourish in the contemporary imagination.¹³ In analyzing Tàpies’s pictures, it becomes clear that national tales concerning the past and future of Catalonia have impacted the artist a great deal. The way that he sought to recycle these tales is fascinating and Bhabha’s concepts of the pedagogical and performative will help me to explain the visual language of art at work.

In his chapter “DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation,” Bhabha built a complex argument on the fundamental ambivalence that permeates national texts, which is also applicable to the plastic arts. This ambivalence affects both the concepts of time and cultural identity in the writing of the modern ‘Western’ nation. He characterizes a splitting that occurs between “the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative.”¹⁴ Bhabha deemed the pedagogical and the performative contrasting elements that contribute to the inherent confusion that national narratives create, or ambivalence. The pedagogical deals with the way that history is presented as a continuation of civilizations and the idea that the nation is a natural and unchanging entity. For example, Spanish history is not a neat tale of ancestral activity, but a messy story of the Iberian

¹² *Tàpies*, Gregory Rood (dir.), BBC and TVE Catalunya, 1990.

¹³ Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 297.

Peninsula, which has been dominated by a great number of people, ranging from Germanic tribes and Arab conquerors to Christian Kings and military officers from Andalucía and Galicia. What we call the Kingdom of Spain is an unnatural combination of communities based loosely on geographic location and historic allegiances that were constantly changing and will continue to change over time. Bhabha's pedagogical is the term that describes the over simplification of historic societies, the conscious blindness to their complexity, and the preservation of the myth of the nation. The performative refers to the constant onslaught of national material used to evaluate and define national identities against others. This is magnified in capitalist economies where the nation is omnipresent in consumer culture. The nation and its virtues do not cease to enter our consciousness whether we are reading the newspaper or enjoying a holiday. The reinforcement of the pedagogical is thus left to the performative, the two are interdependent and they perpetuate the idea of the nation and national identities.¹⁵

National narratives have found a conventional niche in the friction between what Bhabha defined as the pedagogical and performative. The legitimization of the modern nation-state in the 'Western' world has ruptured old concepts of community, producing a new framework that defines and structures the portraits of modern civilizations. A dramatic change of perspective, Bhabha stated, "emerges from an acknowledgement of the nation's interrupted address, articulated in the tension signifying the people as an *a priori* historical presence, a pedagogical object."¹⁶ Furthermore, the inhabitants of this political territory play a role in the "performance of narrative, its enunciatory 'present' marked in the repetition and pulsation of the national sign."¹⁷ This novel way of being, thinking, writing, and painting occupies an ambivalent place. The space between Bhabha's two poles is where both national narratives *and* art is negotiated.

Miró's *Cap de pagès català* provide a perfect example of this theory in practice (figures 2 and 3). Both works show a vague form, aggrandized in its simplicity yet anonymous in identity. The label and red *barretina* make the images recognizable as the quintessential Catalan peasant. Miró preserved the memory of this figure while methodically presenting the image in an avant-garde fashion.¹⁸ The beauty of these paintings lies in the tensions between the historic and novel,

¹⁵ Ibid., 298.

¹⁶ Ibid., 298.

¹⁷ Ibid., 298.

¹⁸ Miró's mythic paintings break away from the nineteenth century regionalist and early nationalist imagery that aggrandizes historical material in uninventive styles. Borja de Riquer and Enric Ucelay Da Cal explain how late nineteenth century nationalists sought to recover "popular memories of medieval Christian kingdoms through the

portraiture and abstraction, and the pedagogical and performative. It has become an iconic painting in Catalonia that fuses both archaic and modern modes of vision.¹⁹

In contrast to Miró's cheerful colors, Tàpies almost exclusively worked with a dull, somber, even dirty palette. For the latter, modern art and *catalanisme* best coincided with the chromatic tones derived from the earth, dust, blood, sweat, stains, and filth. "I'm positively allergic to colour," Tàpies proclaimed rather comically in an interview with Barbara Catoir.²⁰ The artist went on to discuss his aversion to primary colors, partially due to their overuse in advertisements. In creating his own visualization of a Catalan nation, Tàpies, similar to Miró, worked both sides of Bhabha's complex. This fusion of time resonates with Mihelj's concept of "temporal orders and visions of modernity," which categorizes societies as oriented towards the past, present, or future.²¹ Tàpies's mural could fit into all three, depending on the way viewers come to read it, which confuses the temporal dimension, similar to Bhabha's ambivalence.

In the Catalan Pavilion at the Universal Exposition in Sevilla, both Bhabha's pedagogical and performative elements communicated a political statement. Language in the Expo '92 sign simultaneously worked both of these concepts. The style (or visual language) and palette resonated with the celebrated prehistoric rock paintings found in Catalonia during the early twentieth century, which provokes reflection about the historicity of the region, its people, and their artistic endeavors. Tàpies encouraged the myth that the Catalan civilization has existed for centuries and shares a cohesive identity, rather than having portrayed the nation as a modern construction of society. Furthermore, the mural emphasized the historical and cultural value of the Catalan language, instead of painting the region's name in Spanish or English, the official languages of the event. How would this mural's meaning change if it were publically displayed in 2016? Time, and its flexibility, is a fundamental component in Tàpies's oeuvre, as the next chapter will further elaborate.

Les quatre cròniques (figure 4), also made in the 1990s but still partially visible to the public, is a second example of Bhabha's theory at work. Remember that the mural is broken into four parts, each corresponding to an old manuscript originally written in Catalan. Symbols are

romantic screen of folklore." "An Analysis of Nationalism in Spain: A proposal for an integrated historical model" in *Nationalism in Europe: Past and Present*, Justo G. Beramendi, Ramón Maiz, Xosé Manoel Núñez Seixas, (eds.), (Santiago de Compostela: Xunta de Galicia and Universidad de Santiago, 1994) 23.

¹⁹ Krauss and Rowell, *Joan Miró: The Magnetic Fields*, 84.

²⁰ Catoir, *Conversations with Antoni Tàpies*, 95.

²¹ Mihelj, *Media Nations*, 149.

mixed with phrases from the chronicles such as, “what shall I tell you?” It is clear that the antiquity of these four texts corresponds with the pedagogical component of Bhabha’s theory. The four works are glorified and united in order to demonstrate the similarity between them, the use of the Catalan language, and to point out their historical authenticity. Jumping from medieval themes to contemporary symbols, *Les quatre cròniques* boldly illustrates Tàpies’s famous “+” mark in the first, second, and final panels. The third panel includes the four vertical stripes of the *senyera*. These symbols signify the performative aspect outlined in Bhabha’s writing. The repetitive markings make the work ‘authentic’ on two levels. First, the work is stamped with Tàpies’s ubiquitous sign. Second, the four bars of the Catalan flag suggest the continuity between the medieval and contemporary use of those simple lines to signify a group of people unified via a shared language and geographical region. The combination of the subject matter, the four chronicles, and the contemporary symbols compresses the time/space gap between medieval Catalonia and the current autonomous community. Linking the two through an artistic representation reinforces the notion that Catalonia is not a mere region of the Kingdom of Spain, but a historically legitimate nation with its own past, language and culture. Furthermore, the combination of historic content and current location in the Sala Tarradellas, moved in 2006 from its 1990 original placement in the Sala Tàpies, where diplomatic meetings are held also bridges the gap between the old and the new.

Les quatre cròniques is a nationalist work of art that is Janus-faced in its combination of the past with a desired future. Historic material is exalted in order to perpetuate the idea that Catalonia has been, and will continue to be, a unified, cultured community. However, the treatment of the chronicles masks a less venerated history. For example, although the *Llibre dels Fets* is ripe with religious ‘justifications’ concerning King Jaume’s decisions to invade the territories of Mallorca and Valencia, it also includes passages of disgraceful violence. For example, during the conquest of Valencia, Jaume announced that if the *fenévol* (a type of catapult) missed the tower they were aiming for, it would at least hit the women and children below it. The mural aggrandizes four literary works for their use of Catalan, without delving deeply into the content of each story.

It is also worthwhile to point out that the contemporary conceptualization of language tends to blind understanding of historic forms of verbal communication. Billig pointed out that today we have to speak “*something*,” that something could be English, French, Spanish, or a host

of other standardized forms of speech we call languages. However, the medieval peasant did not approach strangers asking which languages they were able to speak. They simply spoke and would or would not understand each other.²² The concept is obvious, yet the current preoccupation with defining our ‘mother tongue’ and the rules of that language tend to mask the basic functions of any language: communication. Languages constantly change and transform to facilitate communication. Medieval Catalan was certainly quite different from the twenty-first century form spoken today in Northeast Spain. However, *Les quatre cròniques* looks to the medieval manuscripts as important sources, as origins of a celebrated culture. The artwork’s historic content and current location in the government building epitomizes the Janus-faced rhetoric of Catalan nationalism in a visual format. It is a visualization of a Catalan nation.

Another example of Tàpies’s commitment to illustrating ideas concerning Catalonia is his 1999 poster made for the centenary celebration of F.C. Barcelona. In 1974, Miró made a 75th anniversary picture for same team. Tàpies’s image has a yellow field with four red stripes in the shape of arrows pointing upwards. In the center is a large black “B” starting the word *Barça* with an outline of a soccer cleat below. A rectangular color sample of the team’s uniform colors is at the bottom. Although Tàpies was not particularly fond of the sport, this poster showed his support for the local team, its legacy, and imagined future. This poster is more than just an image promoting a local club. Sebastian Balfour and Alejandro Quiroga explained in *The Reinvention of Spain: Nation and Identity Since Democracy*, people emotionally identify with unofficial national symbols like those of popular sports teams. Franco’s “appropriation” of the national soccer team and Real Madrid instigated some sports fans in Catalonia and the Basque Country to demonstrate their allegiance to F.C. Barcelona and Athletic de Bilbao as a means of positioning their stance against the dictator.²³ Symbols and emotions carry a significant weight in the production and perception of meaning within these types of unofficial spheres. Tàpies’s poster was not meant to be a mere reproducible graphic (which can also connote important ideas), but an emotionally charged image that commemorates the history of an important club in Barcelona. Furthermore, this team has traditionally been linked to both Catalan identity and nationalism.²⁴

Returning to Edensor’s focus on the importance of sensuality and of feelings in relation to national identity, pictorial representations are a means of producing and reproducing

²² Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 31.

²³ Balfour and Quiroga, *The Reinvention of Spain*, 144-145. See also: Quiroga, *Goles y banderas*.

²⁴ Quiroga, *Goles y banderas*, 134-135; 244. See also: Guibernau, *Catalan Nationalism*, 31-32.

sentimental responses concerning the iconography of the nation. Art, like music, has an extraordinary capacity of quickly being able to trigger emotive responses. Reading the lyrics of the National Anthem of the United States of America is dramatically different from listening to someone sing it in front of thousands of spectators. Seeing *Les quatre cròniques* hanging on the wall in the Sala Tarradellas could elicit certain feelings that beholders would not achieve through reading the four texts that Tàpies decided to represent. Art is certainly not the only way to shape an individual's feelings concerning the nation and their own national identity. However, images are an important component contributing to the constantly transforming nature of national histories and origins, regardless of whether or not they only exist in the imagination of individuals.

5.2 Art and Politics, Direct links

As discussed in the previous chapter, art with indirect links to politics can be subjective. Images may allude to political issues without explicitly expressing a particular position based on the visual evidence. This chapter has examined examples of artworks with direct links to politics. Some were commissions that political institutions solicited from the artist, while others were artworks made available to the public eye in various formats and locations. What they share in common is definitive political implications. It is not a coincidence that Tàpies's works for the Generalitat tend to take up themes that deal with Catalan identity but those for the Ajuntament de Barcelona and the Universitat Pompeu Fabra are more abstract, experimental, and cutting-edge. Any commissioned artwork automatically becomes political, as an exchange is dependent on certain criteria that the artist and patron establish. Alternative examples, such as *Rinzen* at MACBA or Sabadell's donated bell sculpture become political via their content and public installation. Tàpies's bed hanging on the wall is one of the first sights that visitors see upon entering Barcelona's contemporary art museum in the heart of the city. The work extends into an exterior patio, permanently occupying a considerable exhibition space within the museum. Furthermore, the work belongs to the State, however its display and care and has been left to the institution. Tàpies's gift to Sabadell could have been installed anywhere. However the Ajuntament decided to place it in a central square and pay the artist back with a substantial

donation for his foundation. Sometimes the direct links between art and politics are quite visible, as seen in the Expo'92 mural. Other examples, like *Rinzen*, require more thought and investigation in order to uncover the connections to politics, and through extension, power.

Another way that artworks are directly linked to politics is via their exhibition space. Rooms, entryways, businesses, parks, and streets are transformable spaces. The mere presence of art can alter the signals that individuals receive upon entering these places. Think about entering the lobby of a luxury hotel. The walls are often covered in artworks and mirrors with lavish frames and a color palette that makes visitors feel calm and welcome. Now think about entering a dentist's office. There may be some art hanging on the wall, but the general impression is a lightly colored space that seems clean. A certain ambiance is achieved in each of these private locations. Turning to public locations, think about the last time you considered how the architectural or artistic elements structured one particular place. Simply having art on the wall tends to dignify a space as important. It is not a coincidence that the western entrances of Madrid's Retiro Park are lined with marble statues and trimmed gardens, whereas the eastern entrances are nowhere near as extravagant, as they are closer to residential neighborhoods. Entering the park from the city center, on the western side, is an entirely different experience. Grandiose sculptures add an element of beauty but simultaneously impose structures of power. For example, there is a pathway lined on both sides with large marble statues of nine royal males and two queens, whose reign ranged from the seventh to the eighteenth century. The majority of the men are holding a scroll, dignifying their diplomatic skills in favor over violence. The women, however, are empty handed. They are idealized and elegantly dressed like the men, but they do not hold anything. The arrangement of the sculptures form a path and visitors know where to walk because the figures form a lane that leads to the center of the park. Why are these sculptures located in the western side of the park? They romanticize, memorialize, and commemorate historic leaders of Castile in an impressive fashion most accessible to tourists. Public works of art structure the fabric of contemporary cities and parks. They create an ambiance that often conceals less obvious structures of power and social order. They are not merely decorative and ought to be analyzed as objects that structure thought, movement, sentiments, and perception.²⁵

²⁵ For more on the relations between space, setting, structure and power see: Edelman, *From Art to Politics*; David Boswell and Jessica Evans, (eds.), *Representing the Nation: A Reader. Histories, heritage and museums* (London:

Arjun Appadurai and Carol A. Breckenridge characterized the external factors that play a major role in museums in a chapter about experiencing exhibitions in India.²⁶ They argued that museums in the twenty-first century have “internal and external logics... in which spectacle, discipline, and state power become interlinked with questions of entertainment, education, and control.”²⁷ Some of these “external and internal logics” often remain unnoticed to visitors. Space is one of these elements.

Murray Edelman discussed this in his chapter “Architecture, Space, and Social Order,” to express how complex physical spaces are, despite how simple they may seem.²⁸ He was particularly concerned with public spaces, and articulated that their “multiple realities” affect social order and the assertion of “established hierarchies of status and power.”²⁹ Edelman went on to explain how public spaces can also provoke visitors “to reconcile ambivalence in themselves and ambiguities regarding the social world, to turn from one meaning to another, or to defy logic by holding several incompatible cognitions at the same time.”³⁰ These ideas about spaces are also applicable to the structure of art museums, especially public ones. Individuals are often too preoccupied examining the objects that the institution presents to think critically about the form and structure within which museum professionals have situated those particular objects.

The arguments against installing Tàpies’s *Mitjó* in the *Palau Nacional* addressed the way that the artwork would change the space. The presence of a large, wonky sculpture of a sock would deeply change the aura of the ornate and classically decorated hall. The juxtaposition of the old, traditional architectural style and the new contemporary style of the sculpture, albeit of an old article of clothing, would send contradictory signals of artistic value. The conservative, orderly decor won the battle, as *Mitjó* never found its home in MNAC. However, Tàpies’s style has been valued in alternative locations such as the Universitat Pompeu Fabra’s *Sala de reflexió*. He created a stark room with moveable chairs hanging from the wall and a symmetrical canvas at the line of sight to provide a meditative space that is meant to stimulate concentrated reflection. Here, the artwork structures the interior in its pairing down of excessive content. The canvas is a

Routledge, 1999); and Doina Petrescu, (ed.), *Altering Practices: Feminist Politics and Poetics of Space* (London: Routledge, 2007).

²⁶ Arjun Appadurai and Carol A. Breckenridge, “Museums are Good to Think: Heritage on view in India,” *Representing the Nation*, 404.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 418.

²⁸ Edelman, *From Art to Politics*, 90.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

focal point, the chairs are functional yet optional. Distraction is not an option because the goal is that the artwork gives beholders an entry point of thinking without overwhelming or overstimulating. The *Sala de reflexió* is a place specifically designed to transport beholders to an alternative, spiritual realm without religious connotations. The art creates the appropriate environment to achieve this goal, just as the art of a luxury hotel seeks to provide a sense of comfort, a home away from home. Art historians often focus on the content of individual works of art without acknowledging how that particular piece transforms particular spaces. A more nuanced approach to the study of art and its role in society is needed in order to better comprehend the relations between art, ideology, politics, and power. This is especially true for investigations concerning public works.

In 2006 Tàpies created a cover for the Estatut d'Autonomia de Catalunya (figure 5), a document that sought to grant Catalonia greater political autonomy in amending the 1979 Statute of Autonomy. In 2004 the members of the Catalan parliament began to draft the work that would give the Generalitat more power and control. I have not been able to find any documentation regarding this work of art. Toni Tàpies was not certain about the conditions of the cover piece, but he assured me that it was a commission, supposedly on behalf of the Generalitat.³¹ Pasqual Maragall and Artur Mas were photographed together on September 29, 2005 in front of one of Tàpies's paintings on the day before the Catalan parliament approved the statute. However, the picture that appeared in the *El País* photo was the painting titled *7 de novembre* (1971), a homage to the 1971 Assembla de Catalunya, not the cover illustration that Tàpies made for the Estatut d'Autonomia.³² *El País* did mention Tàpies's *7 de novembre* in the background, but did not say anything about his artwork for the newly approved statute.

The text of the Estatut d'Autonomia reflected Maragall's vision for the foundation of a multinational, federal Spain. Although he was the first to defeat Pujol's monopoly over the Generalitat, Maragall and the PSC failed to provide a successful alternative to CiU's conception of nationalism.³³ This later affected the party's voter allegiance. Nevertheless, all the major parties, save for the PP, supported the statute. The preamble expresses the historical authenticity

³¹ Interview with Toni Tàpies, February 4, 2016.

³² "El tripartito y CiU dan luz verde al Estatut tras un acuerdo sobre financiación y enseñanza pública," *El País*, September 29, 2005, accessed August 29, 2016, http://elpais.com/elpais/2005/09/29/actualidad/1127981820_850215.html. See also: "El parlamento de Cataluña aprueba el nuevo Estatuto," *El País*, September 30, 2005, accessed August 29, 2016, http://elpais.com/elpais/2005/09/30/actualidad/1128068217_850215.html.

³³ Dowling, *Catalonia Since the Spanish Civil War*, 141.

of the community and their desire for sovereignty. “The Catalan people have maintained a constant will to self-government over the course of centuries, embodied in such institutions as the Generalitat—created in 1359 by the Cervera Courts— and in its own specific legal system...” The introduction goes on to outline the major objectives while clearly stating that the proposed changes would be in solidarity with Spain and within the ambit of Europe.³⁴ On June 18, 2006 the new Estatut d’Autonomia de Catalunya passed and came into effect on August 9th of the same year. The passing of the new statute, and the Constitutional Court’s 2010 ruling determining that 14 articles were unconstitutional and 27 needed to be modified, greatly impacted the trajectory of Catalan nationalism. The court’s decision and its timing, two years after the onset of a global economic crisis, ultimately provoked a rapid shift away from the movement’s dormant or banal form to a more active, hot topic.³⁵

The cover design is the size of a normal piece of paper, with a cream-colored background, black letters demarking the title “Estatut de Catalunya” the year, three “+” marks arranged vertically, and Tàpies’s signature. The most vivid aspect of the design is underneath the writing where there is a curved “S” shape with five blobs to the right, in the same color and texture as smeared blood. This work mimics the Expo’92 mural but its format is distinct. The small, intimate artwork is for private and up-close viewing, like Goya’s *Disasters of War* etchings. It accompanies the text, and is physically and directly related to politics. You cannot touch this cover without also touching the Statue. Part of this artwork’s allure is its simultaneously visual and tactile stimulus and its approachable scale. The object is meant to be handled, instead of seen from afar with an imaginary boundary separating the work of art from the beholder.

However, not all works of art that are directly political are as recognizable as Tàpies’s cover for the Estatut d’Autonomia de Catalunya. Abandoned projects like *Mitjó* also ought to be analyzed in relation to government and political power. Even though the sculpture does not take up any flagrant or controversial content in its subject matter, its history includes intense partisan debates. In *From Art to Politics*, Edelman highlighted the need to further delve into these sort of nuanced relationships between art and the public sphere:

³⁴ Generalitat de Catalunya, Preámbulo, accessed October 9, 2015, <http://web.gencat.cat/es/generalitat/estatut/estatut2006/preambul/index.html>.

³⁵ Cramer, *Goodbye Spain?: The Question of Independence for Catalonia*, Kindle loc. 1077-1090.

Art ideally requires absolute freedom of imagination, thought, and expression, while governments inevitably try to restrict the exercise of these facilities and their consequences; and regimes like to define the restraints as freedom. Even in democratic states claiming to promote the arts, the link is always fragile and the arts are frequently obstructed. But that inevitable tension should not mean that awareness of the connections among art and politics is also obstructed.³⁶

Whether or not the relationship between art and politics is hidden or simply unclear, it is important to understand that there is a connection between the two. Examining this relationship is a worthwhile exercise in that it can illuminate patterns of thought and emotions that are not always taken into consideration. Although we are saturated in a visual world, pictures and images tend to play a minor role in theories of identity and nationalism. A greater understanding of what Edelman deemed “that inevitable tension” between art and politics will contribute to a more comprehensive perspective of the social history of art and the social history of imagined communities.

5.3 Concluding Remarks

Catalonia is a reoccurring subject in Tàpies’s oeuvre. The cover illustration for the *Estatut d’Autonomia de Catalunya* epitomizes the artist’s quest to balance his unique style of the past with an archetypal Catalan nationalist identity, not unlike Miró before him. Through works like this, Tàpies developed a visualization of Catalonia, one that is starkly different than the *noucentista* notion of a poised Mediterranean civilization.

Less than one hundred years separate Joaquim Sunyer’s *Pastoral* (1910-1911, figure 54) and Tàpies’s mural for the 1992 Universal Exposition (figure 40). Both images are nationalist in that they demonstrate their maker’s privileging of a Catalan national identity, yet they look nothing alike. *Pastoral* is an idyllic scene that intends to align the Catalan landscape and its inhabitants with great historic societies. The Expo ’92 artwork, on the other hand, is like an enormous cave painting made with blood. It employs letters, symbols, and fingerprints instead of carefully calculated brushstrokes. On the surface, these paintings have little in common. However, both pictures form part of the constantly transforming Catalan identity. They

³⁶ Edelman, *From Art to Politics*, 146.



Figure 54- Joaquim Sunyer, *Pastoral*, 1910-1911

participate in the reconstruction of that identity. They are part of the visual language of a nation that inevitably changes over time, just as verbal communication changes. Billig did not address pictures in his discussion of how nationalism (similar to racism as Étienne Balibar previously posited) cannot exist without theory. Each of these images fit into his idea that “nationalism involves assumptions about what a nation is....”³⁷ Sunyer’s Catalan nation is sublime and tied to the land; it is imbued with a romantic idea of the pleasures of rural life. Tàpies’s Catalonia is victimized yet victorious in its survival; the shared language is more important than the physical landscape. Nonverbal forms of communication certainly contribute to the “assumptions” of what constitutes any particular nation, both from within and beyond its imaginary borders. Understanding alternative forms of communication has not been a major focus of academic studies of nationalism and national identities. In the increasingly image-saturated world in which we live, where banal nationalism thrives in its inconspicuousness, it is wise to consider the ideological components of the visual. The analysis of pictures ought not to continue to be

³⁷ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 63.

exclusive to a handful of disciplines, as the image has turned into an invasive part of our everyday experience since the invention of the digital photograph and the Internet.

“The Visualization of a Catalan Nation” points out a number of public projects that are directly related to politics although the connection is not always visible. The examples discussed in this chapter are not comprehensive; they are meant to demonstrate that there can be much more beyond the surface of any given work of art. Many of Tàpies’s works address national issues, although he also made a number of works related to social issues, such as *Rinzen*; some include both national and social elements, as seen in his poster for the PSUC, in addition to countless works that are extremely ambiguous to read. A statistical analysis would provide evidence of the exact ratios of his artworks dedicated to each of these three categories, however the criteria would inevitably be subjective. What is certain is that the vast majority of his works show the artistic style that was unique in contemporary art. The subject matter of these images does not always directly reference national or social issues, but the form is a reminder of the sociopolitical conditions under which Tàpies first developed his artistic style in the 1950s and 1960s. There does seem to be a hierarchy of content, in that Tàpies’s national subject matter was more prolific than his social subjects, while allegiance to his style (which is linked to both contemporary art and politics) trumps all.

Understanding the formal qualities of painting and sculpture is only part of the process. What happens to art once it leaves its maker’s hands is equally important and requires attention. Much like national flags, which Billig pointed out are mere pieces of colored cloth, art can contribute to the banal yet omnipresent flagging of the nation’s presence in contemporary life and thought. Centuries ago, when the concept of a nation was not a seemingly natural factor in human societies, pledging allegiance to scraps of bright fabric stitched together would have seemed to be a ridiculous act.³⁸ Flags and other visualizations of the nation are products of a particular historical moment and often go unquestioned. However, their broad acceptance and representation of nationalist philosophies is worth further investigation. It was not a coincidence that the Generalitat moved Tàpies’s large mural named after four historic texts written in Catalan to a high-profile space but rejected his model *Mitjó*. The Catalan government openly embraced Tàpies’s work when it corresponded with its agenda to promote a specific strain of Catalan nationalism. In our conversation concerning the relationship between politicians and art, Toni

³⁸ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 50.

Tàpies expressed that politicians tend to use art for their own agenda; he stated, “with some exceptions, generally politicians in this country do not understand very much about contemporary art.”³⁹ In a similar fashion, both public and private institutions are able to employ art in order to fit their various agendas. The following chapter will take an in-depth look at Tàpies’s exhibitions from 2007 to 2014. They will consider how both national and international institutions have marketed the artist’s work during the final years of his life and in the first post-mortem retrospectives organized in honor of Antoni Tàpies.



³⁹ Interview with Toni Tàpies, February 4, 2016.

6 The Context of Artistic Content

This chapter focuses on how different historical contexts can affect the presentation of Tàpies's art. Taking a critical look at exhibition practices of the final years of the artist's career and the first post-mortem retrospectives demonstrates the political power of art. Centers like the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (MNAC) and Guggenheim Bilbao have presented the artist differently, creating narratives that could affect the conception of a contemporary Catalan identity both for 'insiders' and 'outsiders.' Cultural institutions participate in the negotiation of identity as transmitters of knowledge. That knowledge, however, is inevitably tied to the politics of the host institution that is showing works of art and educating visitors about those works. The first section discusses the spaces, times, and places that shape the way we experience art. Space here is in reference to the physical and architectural atmosphere in which art is exhibited, while place has to do with the geographic location. The following reviews three major shows organized in homage to Tàpies after his death on February 6, 2012. The concluding remarks deal with a general model to best understand the important role of cultural centers in the shaping of knowledge acquisition.

Framing "The Context of Artistic Content" is a traveling exhibition *The Posters of Antoni Tàpies and the Public Sphere* (December 2006-2008) and a small 2015 show in Madrid #*DalíEnMalasaña*. During the eight years that separate these two exhibitions, several factors have caused major transformations within Spain. The European sovereign debt crisis, the 2012 bailout of the banking system, and the extravagant unemployment rate have all played a role in the direction of Spanish politics and civil society. Numerous cases of corruption investigations between 2008 and 2015 have demoralized citizens in and beyond Catalonia, some of the most outrageous examples concerned: high-profile members of the PP, Jordi Pujol's family, the PSOE in Andalucía and Santa Cruz de Paniagua, and CiU, PSC, and ERC in the Catalan health system. Mass demonstrations that began on May 15, 2011 imitated protests in Northern Africa while calling for radical political changes. In June 2014 King Juan Carlos I abdicated the throne and his son Felipe VI was crowned King of Spain. In November of the same year, Artur Mas led an unofficial referendum concerning the future of Catalonia's relationship with Spain. In 2015 around 22% of the Spanish population was unemployed, compared to a mere 8% in 2007. In less than a decade the Kingdom of Spain underwent a number of great changes. Sociopolitical

changes affect the ways in which individuals experience art and how art, in turn, affects the realm of politics, as this chapter will discuss in greater detail.

6.1 Exhibiting Tàpies

In the final month of 2006 Fundació Antoni Tàpies opened a traveling exhibition titled *The Posters of Antoni Tàpies and the Public Sphere*. In 2007 the show was brought to Madrid's Instituto Cervantes and the Museu Valencià de la Il·lustració i de la Modernitat. In 2008, it continued to the Instituto Cervantes in Toulouse, Prague, and finally Berlin. Unlike ordinary collections of paintings and sculptures, *The Posters of Antoni Tàpies and the Public Sphere* presented the artist's creations in conjunction with the various causes and groups that he supported. The works spanned from 1950 to 2006 and were made to announce Tàpies's own exhibitions and other occasions that he found important. As the foundation expressed, the aims of displaying these posters together were to present Tàpies's development of a visual language and the "commitment of the artist to political and social events."¹ For example, they included the 40th anniversary poster that he made in 1976 for the PSUC dedicated to Catalonia, democracy, and socialism via the text below the image (figure 25).² Other posters in the show included pictures for: a cycling competition, a festival for popular Catalan songs, an international music festival, the denunciation of the death penalty, the 1976 Liberty March, and the 1977 Congress of Catalan Culture.

The exhibition, beginning in Barcelona and later traveling to other European cities, highlighted Tàpies's commitment to social issues via the content of the artworks. In the accompanying publication the curator Nuria Enguita Mayo emphasized his posters that deal with Catalan themes:

... above all his posters are connected to events in the social, cultural and political history of Catalonia, both during the last years of the Franco regime and during the period from the restoration of democracy to the present, with posters

¹ "Tàpies's Posters and the Public Sphere," Fundació Antoni Tàpies, accessed November 4, 2015, <http://www.fundaciotapies.org/site/spip.php?rubrique632>.

² The anniversary poster for F.C. Barcelona was not included in the exhibition although it would have fit with the theme.

dedicated to the Assembly of Catalonia, commemorating the Catalan national day on September 11th and the fifth centenary of the first book printed in Catalan....³

Not all of the posters had to do with Catalonia. For example, Tàpies created images in favor of human rights (1981), to promote philosophy debates at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris (1983), and against apartheid in South Africa (1983). However, the book that was written to go with the exhibition emphasized the artist's special attention to the presentation and representation of topics dealing with Catalonia, Catalan culture, identity, and history.⁴

The content of the traveling exhibition *The Posters of Antoni Tàpies and the Public Sphere* is linked to the historical context in which it was developed. In September 2005, the Catalan parliament approved the use of the word "nation" in the preamble of the Statue of Autonomy. In June 2006 the Spanish Parliament approved the statue and six months later the Fundació Antoni Tàpies inaugurated this politically charged exhibition, as if to show that the artist had been working for decades to support Catalonia's autonomy and cultural identity. Furthermore, exhibiting the posters in Madrid, Valencia, Toulouse, Prague, and Berlin served to expose both Tàpies's artworks and his participation as a Catalan activist. In addition to exhibiting the posters, the foundation also organized a series of lectures with the titles "The Civil Weaponry of Art," "Art and Message in Civil Posters in Catalonia," and "Designing for the Utopia: Design and Social Engagement in Catalonia." These talks worked to situate Tàpies's posters in a particular genus of art that fervently addressed social issues.

At the same time, *The Posters of Antoni Tàpies and the Public Sphere* needed to fit with the mission of Instituto Cervantes. One of the state funded institution's main pillars is the promotion and study of the Spanish language. For this reason, it seems fitting that the exhibition needed to include works that not only addressed topics dealing with Catalonia and the Catalan language. The foundation designed lectures that would delve into the topic of art in Catalonia, while the exhibition itself presented a less specific sample of posters that would resonate with the Instituto Cervantes's aim to present "Hispanic cultures" abroad.⁵ In the context of this particular exhibition, both Catalan *and* Spanish nationalists organizations presented the works of Tàpies to the public, in a project that represented the artist, Catalonia, and Spain as democratic, civilized,

³ *Los carteles de Tàpies y la esfera pública* (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 2006).

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ "La institución," Instituto Cervantes, accessed August 29, 2016, http://www.cervantes.es/sobre_instituto_cervantes/informacion.htm.

tolerant, modern, and diverse. When presented at the different Instituto Cervantes locations, Tàpies took on the persona of one of Spain's many great artists. This is not necessarily a false representation of the artist, but it does leave out an important part of his identity as a Catalan nationalist. Exhibiting the artist's creations in this way, worked to advertise Spain as the home of this internationally recognized visual artist that could be added to the list of other great Spanish artists: Miró, Picasso, Velázquez, Goya, etc. not unlike nation branding, which "enhances methodological nationalism and connects notional image with stereotypes."⁶ Exhibitions organized by Spain's Ministry of Culture have demonstrated comparable strategies to present Tàpies in a similar way.⁷ The following chapter will discuss, in greater detail, this concept of nation branding and how it relates to Tàpies the Catalan and Tàpies the Spaniard.

In 2009, on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, the New York gallery Dia:Beacon held a distinct exhibition titled *Antoni Tàpies: The Resources of Rhetoric*. The content and objectives of this show greatly differed from those of the posters. *The Resources of Rhetoric* sought to carve out a niche for Tàpies within the construction of the history of Modernism, as well as position him amongst the most important painters from Spain. Instead of focusing on the artist as an individual engaging with social and political issues, Dia:Beacon's emphasis dealt with the difficulty of defining Tàpies's work and its place in the history of art:

It has been lodged between two worlds, that of the modern... and that of the postmodern, which had yet to manifest itself. Tàpies's painting is perhaps too object-based for critics who sought an essential Greenbergian purity and too gestural, expressionist, and constrained by the restrictions of the frame for those who focused on the aesthetic of the expanded field.... Heir to Spain's brilliant early avant-garde, whose most celebrated members include Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, and Salvador Dalí, Tàpies is unquestionably the leading figure in the country's art world of the second half of the twentieth century and has remained an influential presence in Spain for over sixty years.⁸

⁶ Katja Valaskivi, *Cool Nations: Media and the Social Imaginary of the Branded Country* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), Kindle loc. 752.

⁷ For example, the exhibition *Antoni Tàpies. Exposición retrospectiva*, Ministerio de Cultura. Dirección General de Patrimonio Artístico, Archivos y Bibliotecas, Museo Español de Arte Contemporáneo, Madrid, May- August 1980. Giulia Quaggio, *La cultura en transición*, 226-227.

⁸ "Antoni Tàpies: The Resources of Rhetoric," Dia Art Foundation, accessed November 4, 2015, <http://www.diaart.org/exhibitions/introduction/9>.

In *The Resources of Rhetoric* Dia:Beacon sought to show how Tàpies's work is not easily defined nor is it similar to one particular artistic movement. Instead, his work is better conceived of as existing on the "fringes of the modernist legacy."⁹

Manuel Borja-Villel curated Dia:Beacon's exhibition, which was co-organized by the State Corporation for Spanish Cultural Action Abroad and began a series of collaborative shows between Dia Art Foundation and Madrid's Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia. Approximately 44,500 people visited the space between May and October 2009 while the show was on display.¹⁰ Borja-Villel selected nearly twenty large-scale works to present Tàpies in New York. Spain's *El País* quoted the curator, who explained that "Tàpies is in the market, what is needed is a return to history."¹¹ What he wanted to get at was that in 2009 Tàpies was already a well-established and highly prized artist within the international art market, however, he saw it necessary to look back to understand how and why Tàpies occupied such an important position in the history of art and how other artists have learned from his technique and perspective. Borja-Villel stated that understanding Tàpies is "fundamental in order to comprehend art of the second half of the twentieth century."¹²

Although the medium of the different artworks shown in *The Posters of Antoni Tàpies and the Public Sphere* and the *Antoni Tàpies: The Resources of Rhetoric* exhibitions differed, the style of the artworks were similar. However, the content and context were unlike, which affects the way beholders understand and conceptualize artworks. *The Posters of Antoni Tàpies and the Public Sphere* was only shown in European countries (Spain, France, Czech Republic, and Germany). The pictures included accompanying texts, announcing (or flagging) and calling attention to viewers. The press release for the show and the exhibition book focused on Tàpies as an individual artist actively engaged in local, national, and international issues. The presentation of the posters show worked as a historical collection of artworks that would give insight into the artist's personal values and ideological views. On the other hand, *Antoni Tàpies: The Resources of Rhetoric* embraced the artist's affinity for ambiguity. In New York, the exhibition sought to

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Statistic provided by Dia Art Foundation. For press related to the exhibition see also: Nicole Berry, "Antoni Tàpies at Dia:Beacon," *AccessibleArt*, June 24, 2009; Ceus, "Tàpies, más allá de la pintura"; Jentleson, "Antoni Tàpies..."; and Colin Lang, "Antoni Tàpies: The Resources of Rhetoric," *Art Forum*, May 2009.

¹¹ Ceus, "Tàpies, más allá de la pintura."

¹² Ibid.

make sense of the artworks within a greater historical scope, without losing sight of the importance of process during the act of creating.

Comparing a pair of images, one from each exhibition, shows that the pictures themselves were not entirely dissimilar. For example, the 1973 poster for Tàpies's retrospective exhibition at the Musée d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (figure 55) shares fundamental characteristics with *L'escala* [The Ladder] from *The Resources of Rhetoric* show (figure 56, 1974). Both artworks use a monochromatic palette with recognizable figures although their significance is unclear. The poster consists of a red footprint superimposed over what seems to be a pair of mathematical equations jotted down on a scrap piece of paper. Above the footprint is a group of painterly, diagonal streaks of red. The large swipe looks like a smear of blood or the tail of a shooting star hovering over the footprint; the pigments of the swipe fade away as the length of the brushstrokes elongate. *L'escala* also consists of identifiable figures, a ladder climbing vertically towards a floating snakelike form. The ladder and snake are not painted, but scratched into the thick, lightly colored surface of the wood panel. Both works are gestural and include representations of familiar things. However, what those things signify is less apparent



Figure 55- Antoni Tàpies, Poster for the Musée d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1973 (left)

Figure 56- Antoni Tàpies, *L'escala*, 1974 (right)

than *how* they create meaning. The crimson color of the poster, together with the smoothness of the brushstrokes above the footprint, trigger particular sensations that would be entirely different if the color were green. Similarly, the residue left from the scratched surface of the ladder and snake evokes a feeling that would be different had Tàpies painted those same figures on a smooth canvas. Both artworks, through their style more than their subject matter, *suggest* instead of dictate meaning.

Beholders would likely experience and comprehend these two artworks differently if they had been included together in the same show, because the context of the exhibition would have been different. The situation or circumstances of experiencing art is almost as important as the image itself. Location, time, space, sounds, accompanying texts, atmosphere, etc. all play a role in the way we experience art. Think about having to take the same fifty-question exam in an isolated, soundproof room or in the same room at zero degrees. Modifying just one factor (in this case temperature) will alter the examination process and most likely the results as a consequence. Experiencing art functions in a similar fashion in that the context of the event of viewing can fluctuate and change the ways we behave, think, or act in the presence of a work of art.¹³ The circumstances (physical, historical, geographical, ideological, etc.) surrounding the European tour of *The Posters of Antoni Tàpies and the Public Sphere* and Dia:Beacon's *Antoni Tàpies: The Resources of Rhetoric* affected the content of each exhibition.

As part of their profession, curators make certain decisions that impact the reception of artworks such as the way the works are organized and grouped (thematically, chronologically, or otherwise). The title, overarching theme, and explanatory texts of an exhibition also play a part in the public's understanding of objects.¹⁴ Furthermore, the political nature of the space where a work of art is exhibited affects the ways in which individuals perceive the visual arts. In the 1980s, the artist Hans Haacke drew much attention to this, forming an "institutional critique" to call attention upon the ways in which museums collect and display works of art.¹⁵

The posters exhibition, because artworks often included some text as part of the work, gave viewers a concrete focal point that signified a shared meaning as long as they could have

¹³ Edelman, *From Art to Politics*, 73.

¹⁴ D. Preziosi and C. Farago, (eds.), *Grasping the World: The idea of the museum*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004). See also: Petrescu, *Altering Practices: Feminist Politics and Poetics of Space*; Peter Weibel, Andrea Buddensieg, and Rasheed Araeen, *Contemporary Art and the Museum: A Global Perspective* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2007); and Robert Williams, *Art Theory: An Historical Introduction* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

¹⁵ Williams, *Art Theory: An Historical Introduction*, 269.

read that particular language. The point of insertion in *The Resources of Rhetoric* show, on the other hand, was more sensational and emotional because of the lack of text and the way that the exhibition embraced the intentional ambiguity of the artworks.

Context affects the ways in which beholders perceive, conceptualize and understand works of art. This is important to keep in mind when thinking critically about works of art and the types of visual languages they create. Activation of the imagination occurs differently under varying circumstances. Even though we can not travel through time, we can be aware that what we see and think is directly related to when and where we see things. Time conditions reality. Recall how different readers have come to understand Hugo's *Les Misérables*, turning the story into something relevant for a specific place and moment in time.¹⁶ In order to analyze how works of art are presented to the public, the circumstance of its exhibition is tremendously important.

Tàpies's *Mitjó* initiative was highly criticized in the early 1990s, yet when he installed a similar version in a different place at a different time, it drew little critical attention. As previously discussed, the debate is an example of the tangled relation between art and politics. Although the project for MNAC's Sala Oval came to a halt in 1993, in 2010 Tàpies installed a smaller version of the infamous sock on the rooftop of the foundation. The institution had been closed for two years prior to the *Mitjó* installation. The institution had been renovating, with an eight million euro budget, and when it reopened on March 3, 2010 the President of the Generalitat José Montilla and the Mayor of Barcelona Jordi Hereu i Boher attended the inauguration. In addition to modifying the structure of the building and its accessibility, the foundation topped the roof with the new version of *Mitjó* to reveal during the reopening (figure 57). It measures a mere 2.75 meters in comparison to the 18 meters that Tàpies had imagined for the original for MNAC. The two versions of *Mitjó* differed greatly in their scale, location, and date. When the actual sculpture was finally situated on the terrace of the Fundació Tàpies, it was not scandalized in the media, as was the case for the first one planned in the early 1990s. A month before its unveiling, *El País* published an article titled "El 'calcetín' de Tàpies existe" [Tàpies's Sock Exists] that covered the controversial history of the rejected original and featured the new one as the "star" of the upcoming inauguration.¹⁷

¹⁶ Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 62.

¹⁷ Catalina Serra, "El 'calcetín' de Tàpies existe," *El País*, February 17, 2010, accessed November 14, 2015, http://elpais.com/diario/2010/02/17/catalunya/1266372439_850215.html.

In a different place and time, *Mitjó* did not become the focus of intense debate nor ridicule. Both MNAC and the Fundació Tàpies have received continual annual financial support from the Catalan and Spanish governments. However, the sculpture's new location was less visible to large audiences, causing less outrage against how these governing bodies spend public funds. Furthermore, the new work fits with the foundation's other prominent sculpture *Núvol i cadira*, instead of contrasting (or clashing) with the Classical architecture of the Sala Oval. Finally, the 1992 CiU-led Generalitat opposed the installation of the original *Mitjó* in the Palau Nacional, but in 2010 the PSC led both regional and local governing bodies. Just as *Les Misérables* has triggered different reactions depending on the *Weltanschauung* of its readers, Tàpies's *Mitjó*, in the imaginations of its beholders, will never be static. What it represents has changed, and will continue to change depending on various circumstances. One of the most important factors was (and is) its physical location and surrounding environment. The sock



Figure 57- Antoni Tàpies, *Mitjó*, 2010

sculpture finally found a home at the foundation of its creator; it is in harmony with the objectives of that particular institution. Had the original *Mitjó* been installed in the Sala Oval, it would, in turn, have affected the way visitors viewed the impressive space and MNAC's permanent collection of artwork in its adjacent rooms. The context of artistic creations depends on a multitude of elements that shift the way that we view, perceive, understand, and relate to art. The following section focuses on the organization of exhibitions and their impact on the experiencing of art after Antoni Tàpies passed away in 2012.

6.2 Exhibition Practices, Ideology, and Identity

In “The Question of Cultural Identity,” Stuart Hall defined ideology as “mental frameworks—the languages, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation— which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works.”¹⁸ Hall included both language and imagery in his description of the ingredients that ideology is composed of. Similarly, these two factors play a role in the formation of identity and the development of what Sebastian Balfour and Alejandro Quiroga have expressed as “new layers of identity.”¹⁹ Visual languages and “imagery of thought” can create meaning, which contributes to the constant negotiation of the self. Both ideology and identity are complex, dynamic, and unfixed. The changing nature of these concepts makes it difficult to pin down particular elements that instigate their transformations. However, this section will examine how art, within different contexts, can play a role in the processes of the development and reconstruction of identity and ideology.

Before delving into specific examples, it is helpful to recall the ways in which Ferran Archilés and Miguel Ángel del Arco Blanco have discussed how to best study culture. Archilés explained the importance of a historical perspective that focuses on the cultural arena as a key component in understanding the national experience. Culture is what determines how we make sense of the world around us and it structures our ability to organize, categorize, and comprehend.

¹⁸ Hall, “The Question of Cultural Identity,” 26.

¹⁹ Balfour and Quiroga, *The Reinvention of Spain*, 204.

Culture also establishes what we consider to be ‘normal,’ appropriate, new, or useful.²⁰ Furthermore, Archilés has outlined how narratives of belonging and identity (to which images should also be added) interact with personal “experiences of the nation”.²¹ He emphasized the plurality of experiences, because different classes, genders, and ethnicities under fluctuating historical circumstances and “rotating hierarchies” do not always perceive things analogously.²² Art exhibitions, coupled with the public’s participation, can contribute to these personal “experiences of the nation”. Del Arco highlighted how both real and fictional concepts are needed in order to fully make sense of history.²³ While empirical data is important for any historical investigation, what has happened in the imaginations of individuals and societies is also worth consideration. We can approach the study of works of art as static historical objects, but also as dynamic transmitters of information and knowledge, which is linked to power, as well as the imagination. Combining the realm of the real with that of the imaginary, especially when dealing with culture, is necessary to make sense of the past.

Antoni Tàpies died in February 6, 2012. The following day, the Catalan version of *La Vanguardia* reported the story with a heading “Tàpies: the ethics of painting, the Catalan artist died at the age of 88 in his home in Barcelona.”²⁴ The article was prefaced with the phrase “in the death of a Catalan and universal artist” and included an image of Tàpies in his studio that was taken in 2003. *Ara* published a farewell article titled “Tàpies, Immortal” with a subtitle referring to him as a Catalan artist; the story opened with two short sentences, “Tàpies has died. It is a sad day,” and closed with a comment about *Mitjó*.²⁵ *El Punt Avui* titled their obituary “The Great Artist and Thinker,” and stated that Tàpies was the most internationally renowned Catalan artist.²⁶ *El Periódico* called Tàpies Catalan and also referred to him as “*barcelonés*.”²⁷ Finally, *El*

²⁰ Archilés, “Lenguajes de nación...” 100.

²¹ Ibid., 104.

²² Ibid., 105.

²³ Del Arco Blanco, “Un paso más allá de la historia cultural...” 13.

²⁴ Josep Massot, “Tàpies: l’ètica de la pintura, L’artista català mor als 88 anys al seu domicili de Barcelona,” *La Vanguardia*, February 7, 2012, 28.

²⁵ Catalina Serra, “Tàpies, immortal,” *Ara*, February 7, 2012, accessed August 29, 2016, http://www.ara.cat/cultura/Tapies-immortal_0_641935882.html.

²⁶ Maria Palau, “El gran artista i pensador,” *El Punt Avui*, February 7, 2012, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://www.elpuntavui.cat/cultura/article/19-cultura/504330-el-gran-artista-i-pensador.html>.

²⁷ “Muere en Barcelona el artista Antoni Tàpies,” *El Periódico*, February 6, 2012, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://www.elperiodico.com/es/noticias/ocio-y-cultura/muere-genio-del-informalismo-antoni-tapies-1393283>.

País remembered Tàpies as “dazzling,” Catalan, and *barcelonés*.²⁸ The journalist Jacinto Antón wrote a remarkable text about the late Tàpies, providing more than the essential details. For example, Antón discussed that MNAC halted the *Mitjó* project, fearing ridicule, a stance that “would have also have left us without the Sistine Chapel.”²⁹

ABC's newspaper in Sevilla dedicated the full front page to reprint of one of Tàpies's works that made for one of the periodical's special editions in 1998. In the center of the artist's crimson and gold composition, *ABC* printed their own title: “Tàpies, goodbye to the great renovator of Spanish art.”³⁰ *The New York Times* also dedicated a piece to remember the life and works of the artist, calling Tàpies a “Spanish Abstract Painter” in the headline.³¹ *El Mundo* did not use the word Catalan, Catalonia, Spanish, or Spain in their announcement of the artist's death.³² Each newspaper used different adjectives and various ways to bid farewell to the artist. The variance in the ways in which Tàpies's identity has been categorized is indicative of the struggle for different nationalist groups to appropriate the artistic figure as one of their own, or of the avoidance of taking sides. *El Mundo* was the only periodical that seemed to leave out any words that could have caused tension in terms of identity. This is surprising coming from a right-wing newspaper. *The New York Times* may have been theoretically correct in calling Tàpies Spanish, but they missed the mark in referring to him as just a painter. Even after the artist's death, Tàpies's images and legacy are far from fixed, as the remainder of this chapter will explore in detail.

On June 21, 2013 MNAC and Fundació Tàpies opened a bipartite exhibition *Tàpies. From Within* in Barcelona. It was the first major retrospective since the artist had passed away. One of the most peculiar and fascinating works shown at MNAC was a large mural from 1992 titled *Parla, Parla* (Speak, Speak, Figure 58). The expansive brown background is pocked with red, orange, black, white, and gray markings. Eight strips of white, six of which are oriented horizontally, resemble words or phrases that have been erased in censored material or documents.

²⁸ Jacinto Antón, “Antoni Tàpies, un artista deslumbrante,” *El País*, February 6, 2012, accessed August 29, 2016, http://cultura.elpais.com/cultura/2012/02/06/actualidad/1328557005_302756.html.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ “Tàpies, adiós al gran renovador del arte español,” *ABC Sevilla*, February 7, 2012, 1.

³¹ William Grimes, “Antoni Tàpies, Spanish Abstract Painter, Dies at 88,” *The New York Times*, February 6, 2012, accessed January 13, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/07/arts/design/antoni-tapiés-spanish-abstract-painter-dies-at-88.html?_r=0.

³² Vanessa Graell, “Muere Tàpies a los 88 años,” *El Mundo*, February 7, 2012, accessed August 29, 2016, <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2012/02/06/cultura/1328557633.html>.



Figure 58- Antoni Tàpies, *Parla, Parla*, 1992

In the center, amongst the random markings and white strips are two heads sketched in profile in black. The large hand of one person is choking the other around its neck. The victim's head is tilted up with its mouth open shouting or gasping for air. This image is remarkably similar to Picasso's 1937 studies for what became his 'weeping' woman, first appearing in *Sueño y mentira de Franco II* [Dream and Lie of Franco II] (figure 59).³³ Hastily written over the two heads in Tàpies's mural are the Catalan words "parla, parla." Ironically the white words appear backwards, just like Picasso's first weeping woman, which was sketched as mirror image on a plate later used to print multiple copies of the same image. *Parla, Parla*, complete with its allusions to Picasso and political corruption, is an archetypal Tàpies artwork. Violence is not absent from the picture, but upon first glance the image seems quite tame.

³³ While Picasso's image of the weeping woman first appeared in *Sueño y mentira de Franco II*, he painted and sketched, almost obsessively, many versions of the suffering female during the summer and fall of 1937. The crying figure even appeared in *Guernica* (phase 4-7) until Picasso decided to paint over the teardrops that sliced through the woman's face late in the process. For more see: Judi Freeman, *Picasso and the Weeping Women* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1994) and van Hensbergen, *Guernica: The Biography of a Twentieth-Century Icon*.



Figure 59- Pablo Picasso, *Sueño y mentira de Franco II*, 1937

In MNAC's presentation of the exhibition *Tàpies. From Within* the artworks were organized chronologically. Visitors entered viewing Tàpies's early surrealist compositions and weaved their way through several rooms, each containing works from later dates. Time was compressed into a relatively small space, as viewers could walk from Tàpies's paintings of the late 1940s to his murals from the 1990s in a few moments. This proximity of space and organizational method yields to a

natural desire to experience these works as a progression. Beholders saw the career of a recently deceased artist unfolding as they moved through the museum. However, the order of the show negates the title. *Tàpies. From Within* was created using many works from the late artist's personal collection. The idea was that the show would provide both a general and intimate experience of his long career. Reflecting on the organization of the show, Toni Tàpies thought showing fewer artworks would have improved the experience. Giving space for the works to breathe, in his opinion, would have conducted a more adequate environment for visitors to calmly contemplate the works of his father.³⁴ Furthermore, the strict order of the exhibition automatically negated its intimacy. Think about having a conversation with an elderly person about the past. Topics, themes, events, and experiences generally trump dates. Only when we remember particular sights, sounds, smells, emotions etc., do we start to locate those moments in time. *Tàpies. From Within* is a reconstruction that ultimately echoes the exhibitionary model of MNAC's permanent collection. Sketching a brief history of the museum is useful in order to fully understand the institution's capacity to structure knowledge and learning via its content and presentation.

³⁴ Interview with Toni Tàpies, February 4, 2016.

The museum is housed in the Palau Nacional, formerly titled the Palacio Nacional, which was constructed for the 1929 International Exposition in Barcelona. Its initial use was to showcase an exhibition of Spanish art, including thousands of works from various areas of the country to celebrate Spain. The building served as the primary focal point of the event. Originally, Josep Puig i Cadafalch was commissioned to design the building and urban planning of the site for the Exposition. However, Primo de Rivera's regime removed Puig from the project, due to his overtly Catalan nationalist agenda exemplified in his previous architectural projects such as *Les Quatre Columnes* [The Four Columns]. Puig i Cadafalch's columns represented the four stripes of the Catalan flag, positioned vertically on the slope of Montjuïc hill. The classical design fit with the *noucentista* agenda to present Catalonia as the inheritors of a sophisticated Mediterranean, as opposed to Castilian, cultural tradition. Primo de Rivera's regime ordered the *Les Quatre Columnes* to be destroyed in 1928 in order to present Barcelona as a Spanish city at the International Exposition and new architects were appointed to do the job after winning a design contest. Eugenio P. Cendoya, Enric Catá, and Pere Domènch i Roura were responsible for the final plan of the entire Exposition complex. Some years later, in 1934, the museum opened to the public as the Museu d'Art de Catalunya. However, just a couple years later the collections were moved to Olot and Darnius, northern Catalan towns bordering France, to safeguard the works during the Civil War.³⁵ The onset of war interrupted the progress of the museum's early development and the reinstallation of the collection was not immediate, the entire body of works was not fully replaced in the Palau Nacional until 1943. In 1990, after Catalan parliament passed the Museums Act, the Museu d'Art de Catalunya was re-titled Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. This law essentially worked as "a metaphor, an institutional illusion of a nation-state."³⁶ In 2010, two decades after the renaming of the museum, just below MNAC's entrance and close to their original site, Puig i Cadafalch's *Les Quatre Columnes* were reconstructed as a symbol of Catalan national pride and at the same time linking Spain to authoritarianism.

MNAC is an art museum committed to the collection, protection, and presentation of Catalan culture. The museum boasts an impressive Romanesque collection, which consists of

³⁵ "MNAC, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya," Mission statement, renovation plans, and year 2000 goals, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Thomas J. Watson Library, 5.1.3. A copy of a document is available at the University of Connecticut library (Storrs campus). The Prado collection was also relocated to Valencia and later Geneva during the Civil War.

³⁶ As quoted by Ricard Vinyes (2000) in Martín Alonso, *El Catalanismo, del Éxito al Éxtasis* (Barcelona: *El Viejo Topo*, 2014), 166.

panel paintings, woodcarvings, metalwork, and stone sculptures ranging from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. These works came primarily from churches of the Pyrenees Mountains, and were brought to the museum in order to ensure that they would be preserved and that they would never leave the region. The Gothic collection consists of a range of similar media, but the works come from different locations, from the Països Catalans. Dating from the end of the thirteenth through the fifteenth century, the Gothic works were collected from Catalonia, as well as former regions of the Kingdom of Aragon that encompassed the coastal city of Valencia, the island of Majorca, and Aragón, territories that many Catalan nationalists consider as irredentas.³⁷ The Romanesque and Gothic works were the original core of MNAC's collection. They constituted the former Museu de Belles Arts, situated in Barcelona's city center, until the founding of the Museu d'Art de Catalunya in 1934, at which point the collections were relocated to the Palau Nacional.³⁸ As mentioned in the 1990 Museums act, the national art museum is dedicated to the permanent exhibition of the "artistic expression of Catalonia and the territories most culturally related to Catalonia, during the distinct historical periods, until the present day."³⁹ Beyond the scope of the museum, the idea that the representation of Catalan culture should not be restricted within the borders of the autonomous community was part of a strategic maneuver between CiU and the local academic community to develop a framework of institutions dedicated to media in Catalan during the first years of the new democracy in Spain.⁴⁰ The goals of establishing new media sources for the Països Catalans, which includes the medieval Kingdom of Aragon and extends into Southern France (also irredenta), were to "construct means of socialization for a 'new Catalonia,' strengthen the Catalan forms of communication, and produce new agencies of practical action for intellectuals."⁴¹ The extension of these objectives beyond the borders of the

³⁷ It is fitting that works completed outside the boundaries of contemporary Catalonia are displayed in this context, as it exemplifies the interrelated nature of the Catalan region with the rest of the historic Kingdom of Aragon (stretching along the East Coast of the Iberian Peninsula from the Pyrenees to Granada under Jaume I, before Aragon and Catalonia were politically united with Castile in 1469) and its independence from Castile. The museum prominently positions a wall painting of Jaume's Conquest of Majorca in this section. See: Borja de Riquer, (dir.), *Història, política, societat i cultura dels Països Catalans* (Barcelona: Enciclopèdia Catalana, 1996-1999).

³⁸ *Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya* (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, 2005).

³⁹ Ley 17/1990, 2 de noviembre, de museos. Generalitat de Catalunya, accessed January 22, 2016, http://dogc.gencat.cat/es/pdogc_canals_interns/pdogc_resultats_fitxa/?action=fitxa&documentId=59538&language=es_ES.

⁴⁰ Pablo Giori, "Cataluña, nación y medios. La construcción del espacio nacional de comunicación (1978-2014)," *Revista internacional de Historia de la Comunicación* (3.1, 2014: 119-139), 120.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 120-121.

Autonomous Community of Catalonia mirrors MNAC's intentions of embracing a broader community and harking on their 'historic' belonging to a Catalan, albeit imagined, community.

The museum also has an extensive Renaissance and Baroque collection. Catalan artists created the majority of these works, although a number of foreign masters have been displayed as well, such as Peter Paul Rubens and El Greco. These artworks came largely from donations made to the museum, such as Francesc Cambó's opulent bequest. The museum's collection from the Middle Ages and the way it is presented to the public mirrors nationalist narratives that seek to romanticize regional culture during this period. Politicians and public figures have echoed this idea, claiming that Catalan culture has its origins in the medieval era.⁴²

The museum's Modern collection assembles works from the early nineteenth to the mid twentieth century, and illustrates a number of different stylistic approaches that these artists were working with, ranging from Neoclassicism to the avant-garde movements like Art Nouveau and Noucentisme. There is also a small but growing photography collection, an area that the museum has been working to develop in order to diversify its displays.⁴³

Paintings and sculptures are not the only means that the museum has used to feature the distinctive qualities of Catalan art. MNAC also houses the Numismatic Cabinet of Catalonia, which includes an incredible 134,000 pieces. The coins range from the sixth century BCE to the twenty-first century and include "examples that illustrate, step by step, the historic and economic evolution of these lands."⁴⁴ Highlights of the collection are the coins that were minted in Catalonia during the Reapers' War (1640), the War of Spanish Succession (1701-14), and the French Occupation (1805-1813). In May 1640, Catalan peasants band together in a violent strike against the Spanish Empire in protest of having to house and support the Spanish army, the onset of what would later be remembered as the Reapers' War. On January 17, 1641 a group of Catalan aristocrats declared a Republic of Catalonia, effectively joining the Kingdom of France. The Catalans won a major battle against the Spanish troops at Montjuïc, the location of the museum, that year, but were eventually unable to defeat the Empire after a decade of conflict. The French crown relinquished Catalonia in 1652, but held control of the northern province of Roussillon. MNAC displays a coin issued during the short-lived Catalan Republic, explaining

⁴² Guibernau, *Catalan Nationalism: Francoism, Transition and Democracy*, 144.

⁴³ "The Museum," Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, accessed January 20, 2016, <http://www.museunacional.cat/en/museum>.

⁴⁴ *Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya*, 122.

that the previous image of the late Spanish King Felipe IV's name was replaced with *Principatus Cataloniae*. Exhibiting historic currency in the museum context draws attention to the economic, social, and political history of Catalonia as well as its relationship to the Spanish State.

Unlike traditional 'universal' museums such as The Louvre Museum in Paris or The National Gallery in London, MNAC positions its regional art as the center of its scope. The institution's mission statement emphasized that "Spanish and foreign works are shown either individually or in groups as specific points of reference or background material to the exhibition of Catalan art."⁴⁵ This fits with the overarching goals of the institution invested in enabling art historians and the public to "appreciate the differences between Catalan art from the rest of Spain and abroad."⁴⁶ Both MNAC's collection and display demonstrate a complex political agenda: to characterize Catalan art as distinct from Spanish works. However, these objectives do not classify Spain as being foreign. Instead, Spain occupies an in-between space, neither grouping it with foreign cultures nor considering it as being abroad. While the Spanish government helps to fund MNAC, the installation strategy seeks to identify Catalan culture as fundamentally different from the rest of the Iberian Peninsula, in an effort to highlight and celebrate that differentiation. Furthermore, MNAC's institutional project has gone beyond simply displaying Catalan art. As outlined in part of their mission statement, another aim of the museum is to dramatically alter the perception of the history of Catalan art. Instead of understanding artistic production in Catalonia as an echo of other European centers, or an addendum of 'Western' art, MNAC has called attention to the need for an objective history of Catalan art, with the desire that this history acknowledges that Catalan artistic production is an arena interrelated with European and Spanish artistic traditions, but one that nevertheless has its own, unique narrative.⁴⁷

MNAC's development of their Department of Restoration and Preventative Conservation indicates the early impulse to protect their collection. This facility has existed since the museum's initial installation in the Palau Nacional. Its longevity demonstrates MNAC's conscious commitment to the careful preservation and conservation of their artworks. This department is crucial in maintaining the condition of the objects and it takes on the difficult initiative to preserve works, a process that then becomes part of a greater cultural history. The importance that MNAC has placed on this department, in conjunction with the goals of the

⁴⁵ "MNAC, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya," Mission statement, renovation plans, and year 2000 goals, 5.1.5.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 5.1.2.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 5.1.2.

museum, makes manifest a clear plan, as stated on MNAC's website: "restoration is not carried out in the hope of returning works to their original state; but rather, to take into account the passing of time and any work that has already been carried out on the piece, and which now forms part of the history of restoration in Catalonia in general."⁴⁸ The early establishment of the museum's Department of Restoration indicates that one of the institution's principle goals has been to preserve and represent Catalan culture as a whole.

MNAC seeks to show its collection as unique yet simultaneously universal. It is an institution that has tried to find a balance between its twofold task: to present Catalan cultural heritage to both local and foreign patrons and to share information about its rich collection. One of the institution's main challenges has been to find a way to present Catalan culture in a manner that is oriented both inward and outward, in a way that demonstrates its differences from other regions but also its relationship to a more universal history of artistic production. The Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya is not simply a collection of Catalan art, but an active institution devoted to the past, present, and future of Catalan culture. However, that future is far from predictable or static. Just as Daniel E. Jones outlined in his article on Pujol and the construction of a "Catalan space for communication" between political institutions and businesses, as a result of globalization, the different spaces and scopes of communication are creating societies and cultures that are evermore complex and varied; a rereading of the interconnectedness between communication, political, and cultural life is needed, one that takes on a "much more open and ample vision, one that does not exclusively focus on the territorial, ethnic, or linguistic."⁴⁹ In viewing the museum as a communicative place with a critical perspective, it becomes clear that art is inseparable from politics in the time and space of the museum.

Tàpies. From Within was organized in a chronological format paralleling MNAC's narrative of the history of Catalan art. Another exhibition, scheduled just a couple of months later, confirms this strategy. On August 31, 2013, MNAC inaugurated *A Visit to the Romanesque. In company of Antoni Tàpies*. The objective of this exhibition, as the museum described, was twofold: "to offer a contemporary look at medieval art, and at the same time to enrich Tàpies's

⁴⁸ Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, "The Department of Restoration and Preventative Conservation," accessed April 1, 2011, http://www.mnac.cat/serveis/ser_tec_restauracio.jsp?lan=003.

⁴⁹ Jones, "Pujol y la construcción de un espacio catalán de comunicación..." 502.



**Figure 60- Francesc Català-Roca,
El Grup de Taüll, Barcelona, 1955**

universe with elements linking it to the art of our past.”⁵⁰ In a conversation with the Director of MNAC Pepe Serra, he told me about the conception of the exhibition.⁵¹ The museum’s professionals were looking to give life to the static and difficult to move Romanesque collection and they saw an opportunity to simultaneously increase the exposure and value of Tàpies within the institution. With the collaboration of Fundació Antoni Tàpies and private collectors, MNAC was able to put together a show that would fuse a connection between the centuries-old works and the recently deceased Tàpies. Serra stated that there was a “natural connection” between Tàpies’s oeuvre, in addition to medieval works from the region that the artist once owned, and those on display in the museum. Serra told me that Tàpies knew these pieces very well, and that in the 1950s he was part of El grup de Taüll. There is a photograph of the seven members in MNAC, then called Museo de Arte de Cataluña, standing below the Romanesque apse painting extracted from the Church of Sant Climent in the village of Taüll (1955, figure 60). Tàpies is third from the right in the photo, standing together with Jordi Mercadé, Modest Cuixart, Marc Aleu, Joan Josep Tharrats, Josep Guinovart, and Jaume Muxart. El grup de Taüll recognized the space of the museum, and its rich Romanesque collection from Catalonia, as a space of liberty. They saw its works as distinctly Catalan, and positioned themselves as inheritors of them, which implied “obvious political connotations,” as Serra explained to me.⁵² El grup de Taüll was basically just this photograph, but their shared thoughts on the museum’s collection and space illustrates their personalization of the artworks and how they related themselves to previous artists of the region. *A Visit to the Romanesque. In company of Antoni Tàpies* was, in Serra’s opinion, a great success and many people visited the exhibition.

⁵⁰ “A Visit to the Romanesque. In the company of Antoni Tàpies,” MNAC, accessed November 13, 2015, <http://www.museunacional.cat/en/visit-romanesque-company-antoni-tapies>.

⁵¹ Interview with Pepe Serra, June 27, 2016.

⁵² Ibid.

Pintura romànica i barretina served as the publicizing image (1971, figure 1). The work posits themes concerning: Catalan identity, medieval art, time, and violence. Meaning in this particular work of art, however, is neither fixed nor stable. For example, the sociopolitical circumstances and an individual's ideas concerning Catalan identity or violence in 2013 were naturally different from the early 1970s when Tàpies created this artwork, which in turn affect the way individuals perceive *Pintura romànica i barretina*. In 1971, Franco's regime would not have tolerated open protests against the idea of Spain as "*Una, Grande y Libre*." In 2013, however, peaceful forms of civilian protest would have been considered commonplace and part of the democratic process. Shifting historical circumstances have altered the shock value, or lack thereof, of this work of art. As part of the *A Visit to the Romanesque. In company of Antoni Tàpies* show, MNAC emphasized the similarity between *Pintura romànica i barretina* and the older artworks in their collection, as opposed to the different ways in which interpretation is unquestionably dependent upon historical circumstances. MNAC positioned Tàpies alongside Catalan artists of the past, in attempt to create a more cohesive, progressive, or "sanitized" narrative about the most celebrated Catalan artists (the overwhelming majority being white males) in history.⁵³

Both *Tàpies. From Within* and *A Visit to the Romanesque. In company of Antoni Tàpies* were exhibitions organized to honor the late artist. The way that MNAC conceived of the shows (including their titles, selected artworks, accompanying texts, promotional material, etc.) had less to do with the pictorial language of Tàpies and more to do with his legacy as one of the most illustrious Catalan artists of the modern era. Furthermore, both exhibitions used artworks that portrayed Tàpies's commitment to Catalan culture while downplaying his commitment to leftist politics. The agenda of MNAC is clearly different from other institutions showing Tàpies's work in the twenty-first century such as Dia:Beacon. The New York gallery's exhibition *Antoni Tàpies: The Resources of Rhetoric* sought to express the artist's value as a pioneer and non-conformist, as were the most renowned avant-garde artists of previous generations, working at a time when the center of the so-called art world had shifted away from Europe to the United States. Will Tàpies's legacy be that of an inventive Spanish painter within the international art scene or, as MNAC suggests, a renowned artist in the long history of Catalan art? The place and

⁵³ The general idea of a sanitized narrative in the museum setting comes from: Boswell and Evans, *Representing The Nation*, 5-6.

time of these types of exhibitions ultimately contributes to the public's understanding of the 'truth.' For each show, there are multiple interpretations that have become available. Media reports and published interpretations about the artist surrounding his shows further complicate the matter. However, depending on the goals of each organization, it is clear that certain factors have taken precedent over others. These nuances require attention in order to avoid oversimplification and the acceptance of neatly designed histories with restricted perspectives. Temporary exhibitions do not determine the definitive legacy of any specific artist, but they do contribute to the remembrance, or purposeful forgetting, of particular attributes. Toni Tàpies explained to me that the Fundació Tàpies is the primary institution that will encourage future generations to come to learn and understand his father's work.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, museums will continue to show their various versions of what is most important concerning the artist's life and works.

On October 4, 2013 Guggenheim Bilbao opened *Antoni Tàpies. From Object to Sculpture (1964-2009)*. As explained on the museum's webpage, which is available in English, French, Spanish, and Basque, the sculptural show that demonstrated a span of over five decades of the artist's work was organized both chronologically and thematically in order to best demonstrate Tàpies's "evolution as an artist."⁵⁵ The text immediately recognized the artist as Catalan, which is interesting considering the website is accessible in both Spanish and Basque, but not Catalan, and it concluded with this curious statement: "this exhibition unveils Tàpies's constant preoccupation with the sculptural problem and, for the first time, brings his sculpture face-to-face with itself."⁵⁶ *Antoni Tàpies. From Object to Sculpture* was one of the first retrospectives organized after the artist's death and the very first exclusively dedicated to his sculptures. Its purported inward perspective oriented viewers to consider the processes of the artist at work and the materials with which he employed using a particular sensibility. The museum, which belongs to the nonprofit organization Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, offered an alternative approach to Tàpies's work, differing from that of MNAC. The general objective of all the Guggenheim institutions is to sponsor various forms of modern and contemporary art while collecting, preserving, and encouraging its investigation. This exhibition sought not to construct

⁵⁴ Interview with Antoni Tàpies, February 4, 2016.

⁵⁵ "Antoni Tàpies. From Object to Sculpture (1964-2009)," Guggenheim Bilbao, accessed November 18, 2015, <http://tapies.guggenheim-bilbao.es/en/exhibitions/introduction/>.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

a cohesive narrative but to demonstrate a personal “evolution” of the artist’s three-dimensional works.

Why did Guggenheim decide on showing these works in Bilbao instead of New York? During his lifetime, Tàpies had many more exhibitions in New York City than he did in the Basque Country. One reason could have concerned the logistics of the works that were loaned to the museum for the show. Another could have been that the sculptural quality of the Bilbao location, both the building itself as well as Richard Serra’s massive installations inside could have inspired the museum’s directors to select Bilbao to host Tàpies’s sculpture show. Finally, perhaps another possible conclusion could have to do with the similar political philosophies that exist amongst Basque and Catalan nationalist groups concerning their relations to the Spanish State. In *El Peso de la Identidad: Mitos y ritos de la historia vasca*, Félix Luengo Teixidor examined the way that symbols are conceptualized, specifically looking for the distinction between icons of the Basque Country and those of Basque nationalism.⁵⁷ The line that separates the two becomes blurred at times, making the meaning of images difficult to pin down. The same can be said of symbols associated with Catalonia and/or Catalan nationalism such as the *senyera*, *barretina*, or an artwork by Miró or Tàpies. Hosting *Antoni Tàpies. From Object to Sculpture* in Bilbao does not mean that the Guggenheim Museum is a radical nor partial institution, but that the local audience could have been a factor in the decision to hold the retrospective in the Basque Country, as opposed to the Guggenheim in New York City or an alternative location, because of the demographics of the potential visitors. Toni Tàpies said that museum’s representatives never articulated to him the option of showing the exhibition in The Big Apple.⁵⁸

This section has covered three different presentations of Tàpies’s works, all of which opened in 2013, approximately a year and a half after the artist’s death. Both MNAC and Guggenheim Bilbao created exhibitions that ultimately celebrated the life and work of the artist. However, the objectives of their exhibitions were distinct. The curators formed their own representations of Tàpies’s work and highlighted what they thought was most significant. *Tàpies. From Within* was curated by Vicente Todolí, former director of London’s Tate Modern. He was selected specifically for his non-expertise concerning Tàpies, as the organizing committee sought a fresh perspective to construct the show. MNAC’s Assistant Curator Gemma Ylla-Català,

⁵⁷ Fernando Molina and José Antonio Pérez, (eds.), *El peso de la identidad: mitos y ritos de la historia vasca* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2015), 57.

⁵⁸ Interview with Toni Tàpies, February 4, 2016.

specialized in medieval art and restoration, curated *A Visit to the Romanesque. In company of Antoni Tàpies*. Finally, Guggenheim's curator of contemporary art, film and video Álvaro Rodríguez Fominaya organized *Antoni Tàpies. From Object to Sculpture*. What Todolí, Ylla-Català, and Rodríguez Fominaya have in common is that they were trained in areas other than Tàpies. What they managed to do, as curators of their respective exhibitions, was to bridge their area of expertise with the world of Tàpies. Visitors, having moved through these spaces, experienced both the artist and the curator's visual languages.

Some 85,000 people saw the exhibition *Tàpies. From Within* during the summer and fall of 2013.⁵⁹ Between October of the same year and January 2014, Guggenheim Bilbao hosted more than 200,000 people while *Antoni Tàpies. From Object to Sculpture* was on display. The show ran for a total of 91 days, during this period the museum averaged 2,376 visitors per day, of which 18% hailed from the Basque Country, 24% from the rest of Spain, and 58% from foreign countries, with the highest figures from France, the United States, Great Britain, and Germany.⁶⁰ These figures may seem high in terms of people who have spent time looking at works of art by a single artist, but when compared to the attendance of other events the statistics are quite low. The soccer stadium of F.C. Barcelona has a capacity of 99,000. In a single evening, the number of soccer spectators, in conjunction with viewers who watch on television or online, can easily surpass the total number of those who attended one of these Tàpies shows which lasted several months. Nevertheless, the art exhibitions did receive a significant range of people, especially the Guggenheim's *Antoni Tàpies. From Object to Sculpture*.

Returning to Hall's definition of ideology, language and representation are contributing factors to our "mental frameworks" that establish how we understand society and its norms. Regardless of the beholder's personal artistic taste or preference, the act of going to these exhibitions ultimately has had an impact on how and what they think. Their thoughts could have ranged from ideas that have been changed (or slightly altered) to affirmed ideas. It is a process that is not immediate but accumulative. If a visitor felt indifferent after going to a particular exhibition, they probably saw things that were already within their developed vocabulary of images and visual stimuli. The artworks and their presentation did not excite, provoke, or

⁵⁹ MNAC reported having 61,506 total visitors and Fundació Antoni Tàpies reported 24,480, there is undoubtedly an overlap as some visitors would have been counted at both of the locations. Statistics provided by MNAC and Fundació Antoni Tàpies.

⁶⁰ 216,227 visitors total. Statistics provided by Guggenheim Bilbao.

challenge them. Their ideas remained the same. On the other hand, if a visitor was awestruck after seeing a show, that curiosity and wonder transformed their previous conceptions about the visual realm.⁶¹ These thoughts that contribute to greater structures concerning ideology and society, in turn, affect how individuals conceive of themselves. Their relationship with those around them, and those understood to be different from them, become susceptible to modification.

For example, between 2012 and 2013 Paris's Centre Georges Pompidou and Madrid's Reina Sofía hosted an exhibition dedicated to Salvador Dalí. The show, which included over two hundred of the artist's works, sought to present a "reappraisal of Dalí as a thinker, a writer and the creator of a very particular vision of the world."⁶² Promotional material for the enormously popular exhibition, the second most visited show of all time in the Centre Pompidou, said nothing about Dalí's connection to Franco's regime. In concentrating on other aspects of the artist's eccentric character, curators conveniently decided not to mention that the artist "lived like a genuine king in Franco's Spain" for his savvy political connections.⁶³ A previous exhibition that detailed works of art that stemmed from Dalí's sphere of influence was organized in 2004 at the Reina Sofía. As journalist Benjamín Prado pointed out, Dalí's relationship with the Franco regime was left out because the curators chose to only show artworks ranging from 1927 to 1939, "solving the ideological problem by omission."⁶⁴ This pattern of purposefully ignoring Dalí's political stance is problematic because it creates a false representation of the artist's political position in society. Viewers marvel at his works, often times without knowing the intolerable benefits that Dalí reaped from supporting the Franco dictatorship.⁶⁵ Does this make his artwork any less valuable technically or aesthetically? No. However, being aware of this information may change the monetary value of the artworks and the way that individuals conceive of themselves in relation to Dalí.

⁶¹ Edelman, *From Art to Politics*, 143. See also: Howard Zinn, *Artists in Times of War* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003).

⁶² "Dalí. All of the poetic suggestions and all of the plastic possibilities," Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, accessed November 21, 2015, <http://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/exhibitions/dali-all-poetic-suggestions-and-all-plastic-possibilities>.

⁶³ Benjamín Prado, "Dalí el fascista," *El País*, July 8, 2004, accessed November 21, 2015, http://elpais.com/diario/2004/07/08/madrid/1089285859_850215.html.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*



Figure 61- Despacio Arte y Vino, Poster for #DalíEnMalasaña, 2015

In 2015, a small gallery in one of Madrid’s trendy neighborhoods opened the exhibition *#DalíEnMalasaña* (figure 61). Galería de Arte Rodrigo Juarranz organized the show that included over 40 of Dalí’s works from private collections. The promotional text for *#DalíEnMalasaña* is dumbfounding, opening with the following question: “Would Dalí have been a hipster from Malasaña?” While hipster is an elusive term, the twenty-first century version of this label is different from that of Dalí’s lifetime (1904-1989). In fact, as Víctor Lenore explained in *Indies, Hipsters y gafapastas: crónica de una dominación cultural*, what used to be labeled a ‘hipster’ in the late twentieth century is now better described as ‘friki.’⁶⁶ According to Lenore, the term in 2014 was married to capitalism and accumulation.⁶⁷ So-called hipsters may still listen to alternative or Indi music, but large

companies have stripped the underground music scene of its allure in appropriating songs and beats to advertise their products. Lenore explained, “the ‘independent’ scene is the culture industry’s favorite: an attractive mixture of reasonable inversions, artistic reputation and opportunities for economic *pelotazo*.”⁶⁸ There is a simple response to the gallery’s headlining question; Dalí would absolutely not have been a hipster of Malasaña. The artist may have shared the non-conformist attitude of the twenty-first century hipster stereotype, but his work had little to do with his own consumption of ‘culture.’ He and his peers were more interested in undoing already-established cultural norms, as evident in his film *Un Chien Andalou* (1929, directed by Luis Buñuel) that was, at the time, a shocking and graphic silent, surrealist composition. Finally, if Dalí was living “like a king” during the Franco dictatorship, the gallery’s question could turn into an offensive, as opposed to an enticing, one. What the exhibition text does, beyond avoiding an explanation of Dalí’s sympathies with Francoism, is to connect the artist with the public. The opening question essentially links Dalí to a 2015 social group tied to a particular location.

⁶⁶ Víctor Lenore, *Indies, Hipsters y gafapastas: crónica de una dominación cultural* (Madrid: Capitán Swing, 2014), 148.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

Ignoring the historical circumstances that the artist lived and worked under, readers are led to imagine Dalí as one of themselves or as one of ‘them’ (the hipsters of Malasaña). Art and the way it is curated may not always make someone change the way they think about certain ideologies and of themselves, but it does play a role in a greater chain of thoughts that have a transformative nature.

6.3 Concluding Remarks

Art museums, galleries, and curators shape knowledge via the preparation and exhibition of visual art. As seen in the previous chapters, often times this process is directly linked to political groups with varying degrees of power. Nevertheless, the act of exhibiting art publically is always political and always a product of inescapable sociopolitical circumstances. For example, in January 2003 the United Nations covered up a replication of Picasso’s *Guernica* outside the Security Council’s chamber room during press coverage concerning the United State’s War with Iraq. Laurie Brereton, an Australian delegate, criticized the act of censoring the image, reminding viewers that just like the bombing of innocent civilians in the Basque town of Gernika, the horrors caused by war are not something that we can simply “pull a curtain over.”⁶⁹ Picasso’s shrieking mother and mutilated soldier were reminders, at that moment in time, of the terrors of experiencing war. In a different time and place, the same image may not resonate so close to home. Viewers often marvel at the original mural as a relic of cubist excellence or a historical object brought to Spain for the first time in 1981, but when a tapestry version of the image was lingering in the background of new reports concerning war in New York, the aura of the image was undoubtedly altered.

Time and space are major factors that condition the ways in which we see and come to understand visual languages. Through the comparison of different exhibitions that have focused on Tàpies, it has become clear that his legacy has been constructed. In the first decades of the twenty-first century, Tàpies has not been memorialized as a supporter of the PSUC nor the Catalan left, but as a Catalan nationalist. He did collaborate with Pujol’s Generalitat and the two men shared similar sentiments concerning the importance of Catalan culture. However, Tàpies

⁶⁹ Van Hensbergen, *Guernica: The Biography of a Twentieth-Century Icon*, 1-3.

was also actively engaged with the PSUC in the 1970s. Recent retrospective exhibitions at MNAC and Guggenheim Bilbao have not provided visual evidence that is indicative of the artist's relationship to the political party, however, they have embraced Tàpies's construction as a Catalan nationalist. Furthermore, the Spanish government has appropriated Tàpies as an important cultural figure to exhibit abroad via Instituto Cervantes. *The Posters of Antoni Tàpies and the Public Sphere* toned down the artist's role as an activist in 1970s Catalonia, and emphasized other initiatives that Tàpies created images for, in order to satisfy the different standpoints of the host institutions of the traveling exhibition. The following chapter will focus more acutely on the ways in which we comprehend art in correlation to national identity.



7 Art as a Nationalizing Tool

“All memory is individual, unreproducible—it dies with each person. What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that this is important, and this is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds.”

Susan Sontag¹

This chapter revisits the theme of Catalan nationalism and art, this time considering the exhibition of visual material as opposed to its creation. While I highlighted a number of the artist's works that deal with the idea of Catalonia in previous chapters, “Art as a Nationalizing Tool” assesses the ways in which artworks with content concerning the nation have been exhibited publically. The first section begins with a discussion about national identity in Catalonia and is followed by an examination of how art is involved in the shaping of different identities. The next section is an examination of how art affects politics and includes an analysis of the twenty-first century separatist movements in Catalonia. Using survey data from Catalonia's Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió [Center of Opinion Studies], this section outlines different models of self-identification and analyzes how emotions and art partake in the conception of oneself and the social world. The concluding remarks address what Tàpies's work has to do with Catalan independence and how art is an invaluable tool to instigate thought.

7.1 Marketing National Identity

In “The Three Spheres. A theoretical model of mass nationalization: the case of Spain” Alejandro Quiroga theorized three areas where nationalist messages are transmitted and how those messages are personalized and rationalized as a component of an individual's identity.² The three spheres refer to the public “official” and “non-official” realms and the “private” one.

¹ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Strass and Giroux, 2003), 86.

² Quiroga, “The Three Spheres....”

The official public sphere consists of the space where public organizations, such as the police force or the public education system, act. Museums like MNAC fit into this category for its organization and state patronage. The non-official public sphere is made up of “private institutions [that] act in public spaces.”³ An example of this category is the Fundació Antoni Tàpies for its officially private status yet public accessibility. Finally, the private sphere is composed of the interactions between an individual and their family and friends. Mass nationalization occurs within each of these three categories, however the messages and modes of transmission differ depending on the origin. Complicating the matter, sometimes varying signals may act within the same sphere simultaneously. Consider, for example, two public high schools in the United States; one is located in Weston, Connecticut and the other in rural Mississippi. The idea of the nation and what it means to be ‘American’ is not likely to be consistent in each of the schools due to their stark socio-economic contrasts. Quiroga focused less on the ‘official’ narratives that come from the state level and more on the ways in which individuals come to associate those ideas with themselves. As previously explained, he understood the individual as an “active subject who ‘personalizes the nation.’”⁴ Nationalism and national identity are connected via this personalization. And, as Quiroga concluded, historians cannot wholly rationalize the phenomenon of nationalism and the fact that humans are willing to “sacrifice their lives for such an artificial and abstract entity as the nation,” however, they are able to “elucidate the creation, transmission and transformation of national identities....”⁵ This section focuses on the transmission of a Catalan national identity within Quiroga’s official and non-official spheres.

On December 12, 2013 Artur Mas publically announced that he would hold a controversial referendum. The President of the Generalitat de Catalunya declared that on November 9, 2014 Catalan citizens would have the opportunity to submit a ballot responding to the following: “Do you want Catalonia to become a State?” Those responding affirmatively would also be asked if they believe that the state should be independent. While the Spanish Constitutional Court made it clear that this type of ballot was not constitutional, Mas led his region in an unofficial vote as promised, without the central government’s approval. *The New York Times* reported on the event in an article titled “Catalonia Overwhelmingly Votes for

³ Ibid., 688.

⁴ Ibid., 693.

⁵ Ibid., 697.

Independence From Spain in Straw Poll.”⁶ A straw poll is synonymous with an impromptu or off-the-record vote; the name comes from the action of holding a piece of straw in the air to see which way the wind is blowing. Catalans living abroad were allowed to vote, but not those living in other regions of Spain.⁷

The results of Mas’s popular consultation favored the yes-yes option (those that want Catalonia to become an independent state), as approximately 80% of the more than 2 million voters opted for separation from Spain. Note that this figure reflects a percentage of voters, not the entire population nor a sample. The Generalitat de Catalunya published statistics and graphs of the votes online. The high percentage of the yes-yes response is represented as part of a bar graph (with the alternative bars representing yes-no, yes-blank, no, blank, and others), while the breakdown of the two questions is separated into two pie charts. The first chart that shows 92% of the voters wished Catalonia to be a state and the second shows that out of those voters, 88% of them wished for that state to be independent.⁸ The most significant data for Mas and CiU (the 80% yes-yes column and the 88% yes to an independent state section) stand out due to their bright orange color, whereas the section with the highest percentage (92% responding that they want Catalonia to be a state) is a much more bland, phthalo green shade. The data nonetheless showed some 2 million opinions concerning the political future of Catalonia, marking a measurable shift in the Spanish winds.

On the day following Mas’s 2013 announcement about the referendum, the Google doodle was a tribute to the life and work of Tàpies. The artist would have been celebrating his ninetieth birthday if he had not passed away at the age of eighty-eight the previous year in Barcelona. The homepage of the search engine replaced the penultimate letter of their logo with an assemblage that the artist made in 1970, a work titled *Cadira i roba* [Chair and clothes] (figure 62). It looks like a heap of filthy laundry piled on top of an everyday chair; to the average viewer, this work seems like nothing more than a bunch of soiled fabric slovenly tossed on an old wooden chair. *Cadira i roba* deals with the notion of time and accumulation. It echoes Robert Rauschenberg’s 1955 *Bed* in the way that it uses ordinary textiles to instigate reflections

⁶ Rafael Minder, “Catalonia Overwhelmingly Votes for Independence From Spain in Straw Poll,” *The New York Times*, November 9, 2014, accessed January 25, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/10/world/europe/catalans-vote-in-straw-poll-on-independence-from-spain.html>.

⁷ Alonso, *El Catalanismo, del Éxito al Éxtasis*, 161.

⁸ “9N 2014,” Generalitat de Catalunya, accessed January 25, 2016, <http://www.participa2014.cat/resultats/dades/ca/escr-tot.html>.



Figure 62- Google, Google Doodle, December 13, 2013

about the physical and mental layers that incessantly accumulate with the passing of time (figure 63).

Art, among the plethora of omnipresent images, signs, and symbols in 'Western' culture, is able to selectively aggrandize national, historical memory. In "The Role of Commemorations in (Ethno)Nation-Building. The Case of Catalonia" Josep Llobera examined the topic of historical memory in the "(re)making of Catalan national identity after Franco's death."⁹ He discussed the sociocultural importance of the Diada (September 11) and Saint Jordi's Day (April 23). These two holidays have a symbolic significance where voluntary 'collective' or historical memory shapes the modern Catalan identity. As Susan Sontag pointed out, the concept of collective memory is imaginary. Memory is individual and irreproducible. She explained, "what is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that this is important, and this is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds."¹⁰ Both the 'real' history and the imagined myths and traditions associated with these two holidays do not stem from collective memory, rather a communal will to accept similar narratives as valid and to perform similar rituals in the name of tradition.

Similarly, selective historical memory effectively reinforces a continuous national narrative in the athletic arena. Quiroga addressed the connection between historic figures and contemporary professional soccer players in *Goles y banderas. Fútbol e identidades nacionales*

⁹ Josep Llobera, "The Role of Commemorations in (Ethno)Nation-Building. The Case of Catalonia," *Nationalism and the nation in the Iberian Peninsula*, Clare Mar-Molinero and Angel Smith, (eds.), (Oxford: Berg, 1996), 196.

¹⁰ Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 86.



**Figure 63- Robert Rauschenberg,
Bed, 1955**

en España. As in the art world, athletes were constantly compared to idols from previous generations of prominent figures of the nation’s history. Twentieth century media outlets facilitated that millions of citizens could mentally connect current athletes with patriotic heroes of the past.¹¹ Popular celebrations, official holidays, athletics, and art all contribute to a national culture that fosters a sense of shared identity. Quiroga has examined this tactic of creating a connection to the past through comparison in his investigation of national soccer teams in Spain. There are a number of places also working to connect a cohesive national history such as the Museu d’Història de Catalunya, El Born Centre Cultural, and MNAC. The subtitle of the Museu d’Història de Catalunya’s webpage is “The memory of a country”¹² and the website for El Born Centre Cultural describes the space as “a core of collective memory.”¹³ Through exhibitions like *A Visit to the Romanesque. In company of Antoni Tàpies*, MNAC has sought to tie together the past and the present via works of art. All three institutions combine together Uhl Heidemarie’s concept of solid and liquid memory, as outlined in “From Discourse to Representation: ‘Austrian Memory’ in Public Space.”¹⁴ Solid sites of stipulated historical memory include monuments, commemorative plaques, museums, etc., while liquid memory deals with discursive narratives and temporal media. Exhibitions unite both solid and liquid memory via real objects and transient explanations that justify or express the reasons for presenting those particular objects.

¹¹ Quiroga, *Goles y banderas*, 24. “Como en el caso de los artistas, los deportistas fueron continuamente comparados con los ídolos del pasado, con figuras claves de la historia nacional. Esto hizo que millones de ciudadanos acabaran conectando mentalmente a los deportistas contemporáneos con los héroes patrios del pasado.”

¹² Museu d’Història de Catalunya, accessed January 26, 2016, <http://www.en.mhcat.cat/>.

¹³ “El centre cultural,” El Born Centre Cultural, accessed January 26, 2016, <http://elborncentrecultural.barcelona.cat/el-centre/>. The Ajuntament changed the name from El Born Centre Cultural to El Born Centre de Cultura i Memòria in 2016.

¹⁴ *Narrating the Nation*, 207.

This idea of liquid memory is also related to emotions and personal identity. As Ludger Mees explained, cognition and emotion are *not* mutually exclusive. “Emotions cannot exist without a cognitive process, and cognition never develops in a supposedly ‘neutral’ terrain or one that is free from emotional processes and memories.”¹⁵ Extrapolating on this argument that cognition and emotion are directly related, making sense of a work of art must also be related to feelings and emotions.

Returning to the Google doodle, the face value of *Cadira i roba* has little to do with Catalan nationalism or identity. There are no stripes or colors of the *senyera*, nor letters hailing the Catalan nation. However, the search engine’s inclusion of this piece on that particular day contributes to the remembering of Tàpies, whose art has been turned into a symbol of Catalan identity. In her 2003 paper “Nationalism and Intellectuals in Nations without States: the Catalan Case,” Montserrat Guibernau explained how the internationally acclaimed Catalan artists Miró, Gaudí, Dalí, Tàpies, and Casals have been converted into icons that play a role in the emotional arguments linked to Catalan nationalism.¹⁶ Toni Tàpies commented on this sort of appropriation and marketing on behalf of both political and cultural institutions:

... this tends to happen, and more so in a small country like Catalonia that is still fighting to affirm its identity. When figures emerge like Miró, my father, like Casals, like Gaudí, there is a tendency to use them a bit as a projection of our culture. This has been done, and I suppose it will continue to be done, they are taken as models, to make a statement about having a powerful culture. They have used the name of Tàpies, of Gaudí, and a series of other figures to project this image of Catalonia.¹⁷

This is also a frequently employed tactic of both nationalization and nation branding, the projection of public figures such as actors, athletes, musicians, writers, etc. as emblematic characters inseparably associated with one particular nation. Katja Valaskivi explained this in *Cool Nations: Media and the Social Imaginary of the Branded Country*, “successful musicians and artists are used in nation states for nationalistic and nation branding purposes, but the field in

¹⁵ Mees, “Emociones en política. Conceptos, debates y perspectivas analíticas,” 44.

¹⁶ Montserrat Guibernau, “Nationalism and Intellectuals in Nations without States...,” 25.

¹⁷ Interview with Toni Tàpies, February 4, 2016. Not surprisingly, Toni did not mention Dalí’s name when referring to Guibernau’s list of artistic icons of Catalonia. It was not an oversight but an acknowledgment of Dalí’s problematic (for Toni Tàpies and his father) relationship with Franco’s regime.

which they play is not primarily based on the global system of nations.”¹⁸ Even though artists may like to consider their work as somehow detached from this global system, technology and globalization have made that increasingly difficult to evade. Many nations create a halo effect around prosperous artists from their region, instrumentalizing their creative capacity as something that belongs to the nation. For the sake of nation branding, the difference between selecting artists and musicians, as opposed to admirable public figures such as human rights activists or politicians, is that their work is more easily converted into marketable goods. Valaskivi reminded readers that the “branded country is interwoven with capitalism and consumer culture.”¹⁹

In reproducing Tàpies’s art online in 2013, Google, one of the world’s most valuable companies, stipulated (using Sontag’s concept) Tàpies’s Catalan identity, indicating: “this is important.” However, it is doubtful that Spain’s Google users considered whether or not Tàpies’s would-be ninetieth birthday had been something to celebrate. Will Google repeat a similar homage in 2023 in order to memorialize (and once again remind us that “this is important”) the 100th anniversary of the artist’s birth? Or was it only significant to commemorate Tàpies’s date of birth in 2013 because of the previous day’s events concerning Mas’s new objectives for Catalonia? Toni Tàpies said that he himself was surprised to see the doodle on his late father’s birthday. He had no prior knowledge of the gesture nor was he aware of any previous requests for permissions to use the image on behalf of the search engine. Google is a company that controls an unthinkable amount of data on a daily basis and undoubtedly had statistics concerning the amount of people that searched for news about the significant political announcement in Catalonia the previous day. It seems probable that Google made the tribute in response to user activity in Spain, in order to complement the political news in Catalonia with an element of culture that is associated with the same region. It seems doubtful that the company had planned beforehand on acknowledging the would-be ninetieth birthday. Culture, in this case art, played a role in linking people to the idea of the nation and it did so in a way that seems ‘normal,’ as Archilés has expressed.²⁰

In *Banal Nationalism*, Billig discussed the signs and symbols that remind us of the nation without necessarily taking center stage. He used the ubiquity of national flags as an example.

¹⁸ Valaskivi, *Cool Nations: Media and the Social Imaginary of the Branded Country*, Kindle loc. 3230.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Kindle loc. 3901.

²⁰ Archilés, “Lenguajes de nación...,” 100.

Google's tribute to Tàpies worked in a similar fashion in the non-official sphere as the image is not tied to anything concretely Catalan, yet the artist's background and the day in which it was posted is inseparable from Catalan politics and society. Billig rightly claimed that the conglomeration of this sort of flagging does not create Anderson's imagined community; instead, the signs, symbols, mediatization, and rhetoric of national communities have become so imbedded into contemporary thinking that their *absence* is unimaginable.²¹ Pictures from other famous artists such as Miró or Dalí have become part of Catalonia's visual vocabulary throughout all three of Quiroga's spheres. According to Billig's theory, their works may contribute to what the Catalan community considers to be normal but their absence would have more of an impact because these figures have become banal hailers of Catalan identity.

Catalan institutions in the official and non-official spheres act as transmitters of these pictures, turning them into 'normal' images that constitute part of the greater Catalan culture. Part of this phenomenon comes from the media; recall the avalanche of press surrounding Tàpies's *Mitjó* during the early 1990s. Even those uninterested in art or sculpture probably saw, at least a handful of times, something in the newspaper related to Tàpies and his work. Other factors include the interest of nationalist groups and nation branders. Nationalists have appropriated and commissioned artists and works of art in Catalonia in order to bolster their claims of harboring an authentic, unique culture. Both Pujol and the Generalitat used Tàpies to these ends. Nation branders, on the other hand, may be less interested in presenting culture as genuine and more interested in representing it as 'cool' and competitive in a global market, prioritizing industrial interests over citizens' interests.²²

The problem with this is that the 'normal' is rarely contested because MNAC is a professional institution and its visitors may not think of it as a particularly politicized space. However, it is impossible to separate the practice of artistic exhibition from politics. Art, depending on the context of its exhibition, is able to support both prosaic and radical political ideologies.²³ Further complicating the marketing of a specific Catalan national identity is its changing nature. Catalan nationalism and the desire for Catalan independence are not

²¹ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 77.

²² Valaskivi, *Cool Nations: Media and the Social Imaginary of the Branded Country*, Kindle loc. 4224. See also: Simon Anholt, *Competitive Identity: The New Brand Management for Nations, Cities and Regions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Melissa Aronczyk, *Branding the Nation: The Global Business of National Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Charles Lindholm, *Culture and Authenticity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²³ Edelman, *From Art to Politics*, 7.

codependent. During the twentieth century many Catalan nationalist groups did not consider secession a necessary nor beneficial step. However, during the early twenty-first century the two have become more closely related; not all Catalan nationalists have opted for independence, but the correlation has been strengthened in the wake of both social and political crises in Spain.²⁴ Nationalism in Catalonia in 2015 had a greater association with the independence movement than it did during the previous century.

Joan M. Minguet Batllori, contemporary art history Professor at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, asked what the future of the arts in Catalonia would be like in his 2015 *Contra la Cooltura; Art i Política a Catalunya*.²⁵ As president of l'Associació Catalana de Critics d'Art, an organization established in 1978 that links together professionals with various roles in the arts (critics, curators, docents, etc.), his response was optimistic yet critical of the institutionalization of the arts; he stated that the future could be how *we* want it to be, and offered the first proposition: to convince *ourselves* that *we* do not need the arts under the direction of public (official) administration, which is so often “surrounded by mediocrity and cowardice.”²⁶ Communication theory Professor at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra Josep Gifreu shared an analogous opinion years before in his 2005 *La Pell de la diferència: comunicació, llengua i cultura dels de l'espai català*. In a similar fashion, he discussed that culture has come to be understood in Catalonia as an administrative question of the management of patrimony.²⁷ Minguet, calling for a dramatic change, proposed major transformations that he would like to see in the future, beginning with “vindicating the dignity of creation,”²⁸ pointing out that the government ought to dedicate much more financial support to the cultural sector, which could be read as contradictory to his previous affirmations. Nostalgically recalling the close relationship between the Mancomunitat de Catalunya [Commonwealth of Catalonia] and *Noucentisme* during the early twentieth century, he also reminded readers of the historicity of the social function of art.²⁹ Finally, he concluded with the following statement: “long live the arts in liberty, there must always be liberty and equality for anyone practicing art. And for those who view and, above all,

²⁴ Montserrat Guibernau, “Secessionism in Catalonia: After Democracy,” *Ethnopolitics* 12:4, 2013: 368-393, 380-381.

²⁵ Joan M. Minguet Batllori, *Contra la Cooltura; Art i política a Catalunya* (Barcelona: Edicions Els Llums, 2015).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

²⁷ Giori, “Cataluña, nación y medios. La construcción del espacio nacional de comunicación...,” 131.

²⁸ Minguet Batllori, *Contra la Cooltura; Art i política a Catalunya*, 68.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

think.”³⁰ Are liberty and equality feasible in the future for Catalan artists and thinkers? Minguet himself suggested otherwise, implying that freedom is only achievable to a certain degree in the world of nations; he discussed how the Generalitat has emphasized culture and art as signs and markers of Catalan identity, yet the governing parties have proved to be useless in establishing ideas about what the history of Catalan art was, what the image of Catalan art is in 2015, and how to make Catalan art for the future without sufficient funding.³¹

In 2010 the Generalitat’s spending allocation for culture was 458.4 million euros and in 2015 it was less than half that amount, 192.09 million euros.³² Similarly, Spain’s spending on culture in 2010 was 1.199 trillion euros and by 2015 had been reduced to 749 million euros.³³ The Generalitat’s spending on the visual arts dropped from 21,572,600 euros in 2010 to 9,182,000 euros in 2013, however the budget for linguistic normalization (similarly grouped with culture) increased during the same period from 34,788,100 euros to 38,008,900 euros, peaking at 45,026,400 euros in 2011.³⁴ The downward spiral of public spending allowance for the visual arts and culture in general, compared to the increase in linguistic normalization, reflects the Generalitat’s priorities concerning the national language and the aspired benefits of increasing the number of people who would be able to speak and understand Catalan. Furthermore, with less financial support from the government, both official and non-official cultural institutions have often been pressured to seek funding from private entities. This further complicates the politics surrounding the exhibition of cultural objects. For example, the second largest energy company in Spain, Iberdrola, sponsored Guggenheim’s 2013 *Antoni Tàpies. From Object to Sculpture*. exhibition. The income of the company’s CEO José Ignacio Sánchez Galán in the

³⁰ Ibid., 70.

³¹ Ibid., 67-70; 132-133.

³² “Generalitat public sector. Budget. 2010-2015,” Official Statistics Website of Catalonia, accessed January 27, 2016, <http://www.idescat.cat/pub/?id=aec&n=683&lang=en>.

³³ Estadísticas 2006-2015: Presupuestos Generales del Estado Consolidados 2015, Gobierno de España: Ministerio de Hacienda y Administraciones Públicas, accessed January 30, 2016, <http://www.sepg.pap.minhap.gob.es/sitios/sepg/es-ES/Presupuestos/Estadisticas/Documents/2015/01%20Presupuestos%20Generales%20del%20Estado%20Consolidados.pdf>.

³⁴ Estadístiques Culturals de Catalunya, Generalitat de Catalunya, February 2015, accessed January 27, 2016, http://dadesculturals.gencat.cat/web/.content/sscc/gt/arxius_gt/Estad_culturals_Catalunya_2015.pdf, 12.

same year was 7.4 million euros and Iberdrola's board of directors earned 14.53 million euros, exceeding what the Generalitat spent on the visual arts in the same year.³⁵

Beyond the issue of funding is the problem that, once government or private institutions finance works of art and artistic exhibitions, artists and curators lose that very liberty that Minguet claimed they needed. The unrealized *Mitjó* exemplifies how politics can interfere with artistic liberty. The future of art in Catalonia, as Minguet expressed, can be how they (or we) want it to be. However, that would involve more autonomy for living artists and artistic institutions to operate freely with substantial funding from the government. He formed a useful analogy for those politicians that act in the cultural realm: that they should be more like excellent soccer officials, that when they do their job correctly you hardly notice their presence.³⁶ Instead of posing for photographs at openings or speaking to the media about their personal tastes, they should work more humbly and discretely, giving professionals in the field the resources and responsibility to do their work. Finally, Minguet mentioned three artists whose works represent the epitome of socially engaged (and 'good') art. Interestingly, they are all women artists: Núria Güell, Mireia Sallarés, and Mireia C. Saladrigues.³⁷ In doing so, he highlighted both the need for a greater focus on artists whose works deal with sociopolitical tensions and the desperate need to incorporate women into what could become the history of art in Catalonia in the future.

In *From Art to Politics* Edelman gave voice to the relationship between art and the official sphere, which Minguet's sentiments echo:

Although it is a central theme of this book that art is a major influence on government, the two institutions are bound to remain at odds with each other. Art ideally requires absolute freedom of imagination, thought, and expression, while governments inevitably try to restrict the exercise of these faculties and their consequences; and regimes like to define the restraints as freedom. Even in democratic states claiming to promote the arts, the link is always fragile and the arts are frequently obstructed. But that inevitable tension should not mean that awareness of the connections among art and politics is also obstructed.³⁸

³⁵ David Fernández, "Galán gana 7,4 millones entre sueldo y acciones al frente de Iberdrola en 2013," *El País*, February 21, 2014, accessed January 27, 2016, http://economia.elpais.com/economia/2014/02/21/actualidad/1392991404_982190.html.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 133.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 110.

³⁸ Edelman, *From Art to Politics*, 146.

Edelman sought to expose the very real links that exist between art and politics, not in hopes of separating one from the other, but in order to be able to better comprehend their relationship.

The purpose of this chapter is not to propose a model that liberates art from political ties. All works of art, once they are shown to the public, become political. However, the ability to manipulate, bend, or twist the perceived meaning of an image is too easy a task to ignore. MNAC is an official institution that partakes in the negotiation, or marketing, of a national identity via works of art.³⁹ The museum simultaneously educates foreign visitors about the history of Catalan art and aims to show locals to relate and personalize those images as part of their own cultural heritage. Complicating the situation is the fact that MNAC is a consortium 'independent' from its three members (the Generalitat de Catalunya, Ajuntament de Barcelona, and Spanish State) with the possibility of adding private entities if unanimously agreed upon. It has an official status, but one that is neither fully part of the State Administration nor truly independent from it. The museum presents the idea that Catalonia has been, is, and will be a unified social group, one that is distinct from the rest of Spain.⁴⁰ Visitors have naturally identified themselves as belonging to this group, viewing the works of art as belonging to their own culture, or as outsiders eager to discover what makes Catalan art unique. However, just because an artwork was made in Catalonia, does not necessarily make that work essentially Catalan. It is true that we can identify particular tendencies and trends in the historical practice of art, but the creators of those characteristics historically had little regards for the contemporary imagining of clearly defined state and sub-state borders that we use as an unquestioned device to distinguish one area from another. As Billig explained in *Banal Nationalism*, the concept of naming a language in the medieval era was unordinary; people spoke and others understood, or not; the ability for the listener to understand diminished as the speaker traveled further away from their home.⁴¹ MNAC's medieval collection is linked to the territory in which it was created (present day Catalonia), but the individual artworks themselves are products of specific locations that were not ideologically nor politically unified in the same manner as today's Autonomous Community of Catalonia. *A Visit to the Romanesque. In company of Antoni Tàpies* drew

³⁹ Edensor discussed the marketing of national identities through landscapes and national parks in *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*, 40.

⁴⁰ "MNAC, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya," Mission statement..., 5.1.3.

⁴¹ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 30-31.

attention to the ‘Catalan’ characteristics of Tàpies’s works⁴², the same characteristics that were downplayed in Guggenheim Bilbao and Dia:Beacon’s exhibitions. Comparing these three institutions and their presentation of Tàpies’s artwork shows just how malleable, flexible, or arbitrary the organization and contextualization of artworks can be both in official and non-official spheres. This comparison is not meant to generate a right versus wrong binary, rather, it is meant to show that the content and context of artistic exhibitions are delicate and can entail politically charged initiatives.

Similarly, educational resources are able to point students to certain facts, while purposefully ignoring others. For example, in a history textbook written in Catalan for the final year of compulsory secondary education, there is a section devoted to post 1945 avant-garde art. The text, published in 2008 by the Barcelona editorial Teide, used both “Europe” and “Catalan” while introducing Tàpies, disregarding the fact that he was also a Spaniard and lived his entire life in Spain.⁴³ Despite the nationalist overtones, amplified by the fact that there was an image of one of Antonio López’s canvases yet no mention of the Spaniard under the hyperrealist section, Teide’s explanation of Tàpies’s contribution to avant-garde art was significantly more credible than other art history textbooks. In Albert Domènech’s 2009 textbook for second-year baccalaureate art history students, also published in Catalan by Teide, Tàpies was briefly mentioned in relation to the group Dau al Set.⁴⁴ However, the group ceased publishing in 1956 and the text is not representative of the long, successful career that Tàpies experienced after the 1950s. A different textbook, designed for the same course and published in Spanish in the same year by Santillana in Madrid, merely listed Tàpies’s name with a string of other “Spaniards.” In this book, Tàpies was grouped with the most prominent Spanish “*informalistas*”: Manolo Millares, Martín Chirino, and Antonio Saura.⁴⁵ These three very different ways to introduce the same artist is demonstrative of the flexibility of learning and knowledge within public education in Spain. While the 2013 Ley Orgánica de Mejora de la Calidad Educativa established core subjects, in addition to their standards and evaluation criteria for the official sphere, the law did not create a strict standard as to *how* those subjects would then be presented to the students via

⁴² “A Visit to the Romanesque. In the company of Antoni Tàpies.”

⁴³ “A Europa, el català Antoni Tàpies va desenvolupar la pintura màtica: el pintor s’interessa per la superfície del quadre, a la qual afegeix materials diversos i pobres, com ara terra, sorra, draps, etc.,” *Història: Ciències Socials, 4 ESO*, A. Alcoberro, J. Castillo, J. Cortada, J. Llorens, E. Ferreres, (Barcelona: Teide, 2008), 262-263.

⁴⁴ *Història de l’Art: Vitral 2, Batxillerat*, A. Domènech, (Barcelona: Teide, 2009), 354.

⁴⁵ *Historia del Arte 2, Bachillerato*, Carmen Aguilar Díaz, Albert Ferrer Orts, María José López Azorín, Beatriu Navarro Buenaventura, (Madrid: Santillana, 2009), 445.

non-official textbooks.⁴⁶ Publishing companies have had room to shape the ways in which students are able to access knowledge concerning different topics. While Tàpies's identity and legacy may seem trivial, it is part of a greater body of knowledge that is presented to young students in a factual manner. This knowledge, or absence of knowledge, is subject to the various political, social, or economic agendas of the publishing companies, much like the different programs of cultural institutions.⁴⁷ Through official curricula and narratives, schools work to construct normalities, closely related to Stuart Hall's "mental frameworks."⁴⁸

7.2 How Art Affects Politics

The realm of politics plays a role in the imagination, creation, and exhibition of visual art. The inverse of this statement is also true: the imagination, creation, and exhibition of visual art plays a role in the realm of politics. Previous chapters have considered the indirect and direct relationship between Tàpies's art and politics in Catalonia. But how does his art affect politics? Tàpies's work engenders thought and reflection. Sometimes his works are even illegible without taking the time to think about them. Depending on the ways in which his works are presented, the focus of his art can differ. Tàpies's place in the constructed history of art, as was the focus of Dia:Beacon's 2009 exhibition, is not a highly contested terrain. However, the artist's Catalan identity and his connection to medieval art and literature, as seen in MNAC's 2013 exhibition or the Generalitat's 1990 commission of *Les quatre cròniques*, deal with a more sensitive subject. His work is part of the many signs, symbols, and narratives associated with Catalan identity. However, as seen in the different obituaries published in various periodicals, Tàpies's legacy is not fixed. Furthermore, what used to be a perfectly compatible dual identity, both Catalan and Spanish, has been destabilizing since the 2010 protests against modifying the 2006 Statute of Autonomy. The ensuing rise in support for an independent Catalan State has affected the ways in which individuals conceive of their identities and allegiances in the private sphere, although

⁴⁶ Boletín Oficial del Estado, December 10, 2013, accessed June 15, 2016, <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2013/12/10/pdfs/BOE-A-2013-12886.pdf>.

⁴⁷ See also: Ken Montgomery "Banal Race-thinking: Ties of blood, Canadian history textbooks and ethnic nationalism," *Paedagogica Historica* Vol. 41; 3 (2005): 313-336; and James H. Williams (ed.), *(Re)Constructing Memory: School Textbooks and the Imagination of the Nation* (Boston: Sense, 2014).

⁴⁸ Williams, *(Re)Constructing Memory: School Textbooks and the Imagination of the Nation*, 321; Stuart Hall, "The Question of Cultural Identity," 26.

some variation of a dual Spanish and Catalan identity has remained the most common throughout the first sixteen years of the twenty-first century. As Daniele Conversi explained in *The Basques, the Catalans, and Spain: Alternative Routes to Nationalist Mobilisation*, once national conflicts break out, “people are helplessly drawn into it on each side... [they] are compelled to take sides.”⁴⁹ While Conversi spoke about violent acts of nationalist expression, the idea of taking sides also works in non-violent yet heavily debated conflicts.

In 2000 in “Banal Catalanism?” Kathryn Cramerer stated that the social and legal acceptance of Catalonia’s status as a nation, in addition to the institutions that mimic those of a state, has engendered banal forms of Catalan nationalism despite its lack of statehood.⁵⁰ In recognizing Catalonia as a nation, Cramerer showed that the community no longer needed to justify its own existence as a nation, effectively shifting national ideas and symbols along a spectrum that ranges from contentious to mundane.⁵¹ Cramerer stated that ‘banal nationalism’ “is indeed becoming the more dominant form in Catalonia: the types of symbols and media which are necessary for this are in place and functioning more or less as they would in an established nation, despite the overlapping existence of the Spanish State and its symbols.”⁵² She concluded suggesting that the Catalan nationalists who fear that the region’s autonomy may revert to a more restricted form in the future ought to understand how Billig’s theory of banal nationalism works before taking action. Since the transition to democracy and before the 2010 protests, groups seeking to increase the nationalization of Catalans and Catalanist values were disjoined. Individuals who considered that Catalonia’s inclusion as an autonomous community in the democratic Kingdom of Spain was acceptable largely outnumbered pro-independence nationalists. Historically, a number of both civil and political groups have sought to encourage the idea that Catalonia is remarkably distinct from the rest of Spain, however popular support for secession has been a more recent development.

About a decade after Cramerer published her article, a resurgence of media attention concerning Catalan nationalism weakened her theory that nationalism was on the wane and institutions of the official sphere have been supporting art exhibitions such as *A Visit to the Romanesque. In company of Antoni Tàpies and Tàpies. From Within*. National identity, the

⁴⁹ Daniele Conversi, *The Basques, the Catalans, and Spain. Alternative Routes to Nationalist Mobilisation* (Reno and Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 1997), 269.

⁵⁰ Kathryn Cramerer, “Banal Catalanism?” *National Identities* 2:2 (2000), 154.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 154-155.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 154.

individual's personalization of nationalist concepts, has been a major factor with real political consequences in Catalonia during the twenty-first century and its importance does not seem to be diminishing. The population of supporters in favor of Catalan secession reached a peak in 2012 around 57%, as compared to about 43% in 2011 and 55% in 2013.⁵³ Although the more than 2 million citizens who showed up to vote on November 9, 2014 may conceive of their individual national identities as fixed, statistical data has shown that self-identification concerning national identity in Catalonia is fluctuating and variable.⁵⁴

Data from the Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió showed that in 2012, 35% of questionnaire participants indicated that they felt as much Spanish as Catalan, while 29.6% felt only Catalan.⁵⁵ In November 2016 almost half (44.1%) responded that they are Catalan and live in Catalonia, as opposed to Catalan living in Spain or Spanish living in Catalonia or Spain; when asked to locate themselves on a scale from zero to ten (zero corresponding to "màxim espanyolisme" and ten "màxim catalanisme") 36.7% situated themselves in the middle of the two poles while 4.5% placed themselves at zero, 14.6% at ten, and 11.1% at eight.⁵⁶ In the same survey, in a question that asked about the current political situation in Spain 39.4% responded that it was bad and 47.6% very bad. Dissatisfaction with Spanish politics, concerns with the economic situation of the autonomous community and the Spanish State, high unemployment rates, low job security, and the polarization of political parties in Catalonia are contributing factors that have caused shifts in public opinions and feelings.

In "Secessionism in Catalonia: After Democracy" Guibernau outlined three main issues that caused the independence movement to accelerate to unprecedented levels. First, she highlighted the inability of José María Aznar's government (1996-2004) to address increasing demands for further autonomy in Catalonia. Second, she outlined how the Constitutional Court's 2010 ruling for modifications to the already-sanctioned 2006 Statute of Autonomy in Catalonia caused tension between the regional and central governments. Finally, Guibernau addressed how

⁵³ See: Montserrat Guibernau, "Catalan Secessionism: Young People's expectations and Political Change," *The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs* 49:3 (July 2014: 106-117), 114 and Baròmetre d'Opinió Política (BOP). 3^a onada 2012- REO 705, Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió, Generalitat de Catalunya, accessed March 7, 2016, <http://ceo.gencat.cat/ceop/AppJava/pages/estudis/categories/fitxaEstudi.html>....

⁵⁴ Thomas Jeffrey Miley, "Against the Thesis of the 'Civic Nation': The Case of Catalonia in Contemporary Spain," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 13:1 (2007), 10.

⁵⁵ Baròmetre d'Opinió Política (BOP). 3^a onada 2012- REO 705, Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió.

⁵⁶ Baròmetre d'Opinió Política (BOP). 3^a onada 2016- REO 835, Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió, Generalitat de Catalunya, accessed January 25, 2017, <http://ceo.gencat.cat/ceop/AppJava/pages/home/fitxaEstudi.html>....

the public's understanding of the repercussions of accumulating annual deficits in Catalonia affected how individuals felt towards government spending.⁵⁷ Although Guibernau defined these as the leading causes, she also acknowledged how personal sentiments have played a part in the rapid development of the independence movement, "...the emotions they [the factors outlined above] have triggered are closely connected with the rise of secessionism in Catalonia."⁵⁸ Feelings and emotions also impact the ways in which individuals determine the weight of their Spanish and/or Catalan identities.

As Guibernau discussed in "Catalan Secessionism: Young People's expectations and Political Change," modern nationalism in Catalonia did not develop as a "unified phenomenon."⁵⁹ Similarly, Cramerer stated in 2014 in *Goodbye Spain?: The Question of Independence for Catalonia*, "fragmentation has been a perpetual characteristic of Catalan separatism up to the present day."⁶⁰ Part of this disjointed nature stems from the various ways in which individuals conceive of their identity, in turn having an affect on what they believe about the relationship between the nation of Catalonia and the nation of Spain. However, what was a minority and fragmented movement before the global financial crisis of 2008 and the 2010 Constitutional Court rulings concerning the legality of the 2006 Autonomy Statute snowballed into a much more powerful push towards sovereignty in the ensuing years, with the "most significant leaps in support" occurring just after Tàpies's death, between March and November of 2012.⁶¹

The great leap in support from what was historically a fragmented, disjointed movement could fit into Ian Shapiro's theory concerning human action and the resistance of domination outlined in *Politics Against Domination*. In a discussion of the term "nondominance," Shapiro stated, "political philosophers pay too little attention to the reality that people know a lot more about what they are against than what they favor, and that one of the things they resist is domination or the prospect of it."⁶² The tremendous increase in support for independence did not occur in 2006 parallel to a push for further autonomy within Spain, but as a reaction to circumstances that Catalan citizens did *not* want: such as reforming the Autonomy Statute and to

⁵⁷ Guibernau, "Secessionism in Catalonia: After Democracy," 380-381.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 381.

⁵⁹ Guibernau, "Catalan Secessionism: Young People's expectations and Political Change," 109.

⁶⁰ Cramerer, *Goodbye Spain?: The Question of Independence for Catalonia*, Kindle loc. 525.

⁶¹ Ibid., Kindle loc. 551.

⁶² Ian Shapiro, *Politics Against Domination* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2016), Kindle loc. 53.

continue financing less wealthy regions of Spain via tax payments to the central government. Perhaps the increase in support for independence has more to do with what individuals *do not* want, than the objective of becoming a nation separate from the Kingdom of Spain.

Although popular support of the separatist movement has declined since 2012, the movement's organization and paralleled political power has not diminished. The pro-independence Candidatura d'Unitat Popular (CUP, established in 1986) increased from three seats in 2012, the party's first year running in the elections for the Catalan parliament, to ten seats in 2015. At the same time, as Astrid Barrio and Juan Rodríguez Teruel explained in a 2013 article concerning the radicalization of political parties in Catalonia, the spectrum of "*españolismo/catalanismo*" became increasingly important along with the emergence of new parties during the first years of the twenty-first century, convoluting the traditional model based on a liberal/conservative spectrum. In 2012 CiU and ERC were hedging one another to compete for Catalan nationalist voters, resulting in the polarization of political parties to "levels without precedent."⁶³ Barrio and Rodríguez Teruel interestingly pointed out that while great shifts that occurred within the party system are related to changes in the electorate, their correlation is not exact.⁶⁴ In June 2015, the CiU coalition split. The CDC advocated for Catalan independence, to which UCD held a much more mild stance. For the September elections of the same year, CDC allied with ERC as part of the coalition Junts pel sí, consolidating 62 of the 135 seats in the Catalan Parliament. Although voter support for independence may have fallen since 2012, political parties have set agendas to position themselves more favorably in relation to other parties, which does not necessarily reflect a perfect match with the opinions of the electorate.⁶⁵

Enric Martínez-Herrera and Thomas Jeffery Miley emphasized a similar point in "The constitution and the politics of national identity in Spain," they outlined, "preferences of the general public stand in sharp contrast with the preferences of influential sections of the Basque and Catalan regional political establishment... current challenges to the constitutional compromise are driven by political elite."⁶⁶ This fits with Martínez-Herrera and Miley's understanding of the elite instigation of the nationalist movement in Catalonia, as opposed to

⁶³ Astrid Barrio and Juan Rodríguez Teruel, "Por qué se han radicalizado los partidos políticos en Cataluña? El sistema de partidos y el agua del soberanismo (1999-2012)," *Pòle Sud*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2014, 10-13.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁶ Enric Martínez-Herrera and Thomas Jeffery Miley, "The constitution and the politics of national identity in Spain," *Nations and Nationalism* 16, 2010, 6-30, 6.

bottom-up models that point to the number of citizens that attended massive demonstrations in 2010 and 2012.⁶⁷ Consequently, as Justo Beramendi has persuasively explained, in 2015 the independence movement was characterized as “too strong to permit compromises and too weak for the secession to be indisputable.”⁶⁸ Too strong because in 2015 ERC and CDC had already set clear separatist agendas, contributing to the June dissolution of CiU, and too weak because the population was split concerning support for independence. At this point, almost a third of Catalan citizens considered themselves equally Spanish and Catalan, however it is important to remember that there is not an exact correlation between national identification and support for independence.

Those that conceive of themselves as partially or wholly Catalan have been faced with the dilemma of supporting or opposing the separatist movement. Here is where the concept of “nested” vs. “bi-cultural” identities comes into play.⁶⁹ In “Against the Thesis of the Civic Nation,” Miley argued that in contemporary Catalonia both of these models are in operation. Nested identities refer to those who consider that being Catalan is part of being Spanish. The visual representation of this would look like a small circle (Catalan) within a larger circle (Spanish), like an egg in a nest. An exemplary public figure that embodies this concept is the professional basketball player Pau Gasol, in a 2008 interview in the United States Gasol stated, “I consider myself Catalan but I am also Spanish.”⁷⁰ In *Goles y banderas*, Quiroga showed the compatibility of these two identities, manifested in the streets of Barcelona in 2010.⁷¹ Hundreds of thousands of people banded together on July 19, 2010 in protest of the Spanish Constitutional Court’s decision to modify the 2006 Statute of Autonomy. *Ómnium Cultural*, an association fostering the spread of Catalan language and culture with clandestine origins under Franco’s Spain, organized the manifestation using the slogan “*som una nació*” [we are a nation]. The following day, Spain’s national soccer team won the World Cup for the first time and thousands of supporters celebrated in the streets of Barcelona chanting “*yo soy español, español, español*” [I am Spanish, Spanish, Spanish].⁷² These events demonstrated the coexistence of both Catalan and Spanish identities via the physical and ideological participation of the crowds of people that took part in

⁶⁷ Ibid., 17. See also: Miley, “Against the Thesis of the ‘Civic Nation.’”

⁶⁸ Justo Beramendi, “Cataluña y el derecho a decidir,” *Ayer* 99 (2015), 280.

⁶⁹ Miley, “Against the Thesis of the ‘Civic Nation.’”

⁷⁰ NBA Los Angeles Lakers, http://www.nba.com/lakers/multimedia?ls=nav_multimedia.

⁷¹ Quiroga, *Goles y banderas*, 171.

⁷² Ibid., 171.

these acts. For many, being Catalan was not (and is not) incompatible with being Spanish nor was the population's diversity of identities problematic in this situation.

Miley proposed another model that he linked primarily to native Catalan speakers. The bi-cultural form also includes both Catalan and Spanish identities, yet they are conceived of as separate and distinct identifications. This would look like two circles floating in separate spaces. The decision to separate from Spain would seem more logical to those that consider themselves as foreigners, only Catalan, or bi-cultural. The ethno-linguistic characteristics of the population that has adopted the bi-cultural model has determined Miley's thesis against calling the Catalan nationalist movement 'civic.' Instead, he argued that the national project in Catalonia was broadly an elitist, top-down effort emphasizing ethnicity and language as markers of what it means to be Catalan.⁷³

The balance between Miley's two categorical distinctions (nested/bi-cultural), that broadly encompass the majority of the population living in Catalonia, is not static. Identity is not a fixed property determined at birth. Future generations could include this disparity or yield and reflect other fusions, such as a more European orientation. Art and culture can be used as nationalizing tools in all three spheres as a means of changing the ways in which individuals understand the world. Hall's notion of "mental frameworks," which allow people to make associations and comprehend the ways in which society works, is the primer for actions. Ideas are followed by thoughts about what individuals ought to do.⁷⁴

Art and its contemporary exhibition is one of the many ways in which the Catalan nation has been presented as a legitimate political and historical entity. El Born Centre de Cultura i Memòria, formerly El Born Centre Cultural, is one example that has worked to solidify a single narrative concerning the history of Catalonia. Fundació Miró, nestled behind MNAC on Montjuïc, has also formed exhibitions directly related to the institution's vision of Catalan history in the semi-public sphere. For example, in 2001 and 2004 the Fundació Miró hosted the temporary exhibitions *Joan Brossa o la revolta poètica* and *Manifest groc. Dalí, Gasch, Montanyà i l'antiart*. The Generalitat sponsored both shows, which highlighted a number of

⁷³ Miley, "Against the Thesis of the 'Civic Nation,'" 17.

⁷⁴ Stuart Hall, "Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-Structuralist Debates," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 2:2 (1985), 99.

Catalan artists without mentioning their Spanish identities.⁷⁵ Failing to point out Brossa, Dalí, and Gasch's Spanish identities is not a falsification. However, it would have guided visitors' "mental frameworks." Presenting these figures as admirable for their artistic constructions and political engagement, and leaving out the fact that they were both Catalan and Spanish, is significant. This seemingly small detail can have a more extensive impact when beholders come to reflect on their relationship to these figures and their works of art.

At different moments in time, in different spaces and spheres, Catalonia has been differentiated from Spain, while other times it has been projected as nested within Spain. Art has often played a key role in the Catalan nationalist narrative that presents Catalonia as a sophisticated and modern nation vis-à-vis the representation of Spain as backwards, old-fashioned, and unsophisticated. MNAC's use of Tàpies is an example of this at work within the official sphere. However, as we have seen with some alternative exhibitions in official and non-official cultural institutions, as well as in literature and press related to Tàpies, a bi-cultural model has also been employed, albeit less frequently, in order to assert and celebrate the artist's Spanish heritage. Each version is true, and this is why it is important to think when standing before, or reading about, a work of art.

In the final chapter of Edelman's *From Art to Politics*, the author spoke about the beneficial role of art in democratic societies:

Although art is no more a bastion of democracy than elections and lobbying are, it does strengthen democracy in some respects. Because it excites minds and feelings as everyday experiences ordinarily do not, it is a provocation, an incentive to mental and emotional alertness. Its creation of new realities means that it can intrude upon passive acceptance of conventional ideas and banal responses to political clichés. For that reason art can help foster a reflective public that is less inclined to think and act in a herd spirit or according to the cues and dictates provided by a privileged oligarchy.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ "Joan Brossa o la revolta poètica," Fundació Miró, accessed January 25, 2017, <http://www.fmirobcn.org/exposicions/122/joan-brossa-o-la-revolta-poetica>; "Manifest groc. Dalí, Gasch, Montanya i l'antiart," Fundació Miró, accessed January 25, 2017, <http://www.fmirobcn.org/exposicions/96/manifest-groc-dali-gasch-montanya-i-lantiart>.

⁷⁶ Edelman, *From Art to Politics*, 143-144.

This is exactly what Tàpies intended to accomplish with his artwork. He sought to engage viewers, compelling them to think through his compositions and not focus on the aesthetic surface value.

His art repeatedly referred directly to topics concerning Catalan history and identity, but he also addressed political topics not necessarily tied to Catalonia such as war in Bosnia or apartheid in South Africa. Still, a great deal of his work remained less focused and more meditative. What all his works had, and continue to have, in common is a link to the political world and their creator's insistence on their function as a starting point. That starting point serves as the building block for further thoughts, experiences, and actions. The starting point can shift, alter, or strengthen previous "mental frameworks" and ways in which individuals come to understand the world. Tàpies's works were not necessarily meant to instigate political action. Instead, they were made to stimulate the thoughts that come before calculated actions.

Tàpies stated in 1969, "...these images, as most works of art, have never been an end in and of themselves, they should rather be viewed as a springboard, as a means to reach farther ends."⁷⁷ The farther ends that Tàpies spoke about are in essence the seeds of knowledge. Art may or may not teach us anything about what Michel Foucault called the "regimes of truth." However, good art makes us think and as Minguet rightly claimed: "*ens fa més savis*" [it makes us wiser].⁷⁸

7.3 Concluding Remarks

What does the work of a modern artist have to do with Catalan independence? James C. Scott reminded us that behind social movements exist layers of hidden and disguised transcripts. In the Catalan case, different ideas concerning the nation and its relation to Spain have spanned more than a century. At times these ideas have been discussed openly and other times kept behind closed doors. Tàpies created a visual language in the 1950s that sought to undermine Francoism and uphold values of democracy and freedom. Via Tàpies, art has played a role in the imagination of a Catalan nation. His work helped to propel the visualization of a contemporary *Catalunya*. While his art does not always reveal his resolute commitment to Catalan nationalism,

⁷⁷ Tàpies, *Complete Writings Volume II. Collected Essays*, 107.

⁷⁸ Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1984); Minguet Batllori, *Contra la Cooltura; Art i política a Catalunya*, 134.

it composed part of the hidden and infrapolitical dialogue that has a long and rich visual history in Catalonia. The artist and his works of art, with the support of government and cultural institutions, have been turned into symbols of Catalan culture in all three of Quiroga's spheres. Similarly, Spanish agencies have done the same in the public sphere through exhibitions that highlight the artist as one of Spain's many extraordinary and internationally renowned visual artists. These two different classifications are not mutually exclusive but have framed the artist and his legacy in distinct formats. During his lifetime, Tàpies was most often portrayed as both ideologically progressive and a Catalan nationalist. However, independence was not one of his preoccupations. After the transition to democracy, the artist supported Catalonia's position as part of Spain. Toni Tàpies explained to me that we could certainly categorize his father as a Catalan nationalist, but for him that meant the reestablishment of Catalonia's autonomy after Franco's death in a democratic Spain similar to models in other European countries with federalist systems. According to his son, under Franco's regime Tàpies defended Catalan nationalism that (for him) corresponded to a historical model of government absent of absolute power. As Toni explained, "Catalonia was one of the first countries to have a constitution, to defend this was to defend, at that time, something that did not yet exist in Spain, and in this sense my father was a Catalan nationalist."⁷⁹ This tells us little about Tàpies's thoughts towards the independence movement, but it does highlight that he was invested in more than a cultural form of Catalan nationalism.

In 1996 Stuart Hall hypothesized that the consequences of globalization would change the post-modern identity. He proposed three possible outcomes: national identities would become eroded and replaced with homogenized international identities, national identities would become strengthened in resisting globalization, or that national identities would disappear in favor of new hybrid identities.⁸⁰ In the case of Catalonia, national identity has become strengthened in the aftermath of the central government's intervention in the Statue of Autonomy's legality, a major economic crisis, and abundant cases of political corruption throughout Spain. Both those that have sought independence and those that have advocated for the right to vote concerning the issue (in a legal referendum similar to that of Scotland on September 18, 2014) do not seem to have been harking on their national identities in resistance

⁷⁹ Interview with Toni Tàpies, February 4, 2016.

⁸⁰ Hall, "The Question of Cultural Identity," 619.

to globalization; nor has there been any recent attempt on behalf of Madrid's government to convert or absorb Catalan identity, language, or culture into a greater Spanish one.

The shift from banal to hot nationalism that has taken place over the last decade in Catalonia has accelerated in response to socioeconomic circumstances rather than in resistance to a competing supranational or homogenized global identity.⁸¹ Regardless of whether or not Catalonia becomes an independent state in the future, nationalism has emerged in both political and civic spheres as a heavily debated issue. For future generations, what it means to be or feel Catalan could become less compatible with being Spanish in a shared, nested identity. However, in 2015 the balanced coexistence of the two identities outweighed any other combination, demonstrating the gap that Barrio and Rodríguez Teruel explained between electorate opinion and the party system. Further complicating the situation is that some of those who felt both Catalan and Spanish may have thought that an independent Catalan State would be the best option. The change from a less evident to a more visible form of nationalism in Catalonia was not solely reflected in the official political sphere as a radicalization of parties, emphasizing not a spectrum of right/left but of national allegiance "*españolismo/catalanismo*,"⁸² official cultural institutions have also been actively participating in the contemporary construction or marketing of identity and the conception of how it relates to the past, as seen in MNAC's temporary exhibitions in addition to other museums and cultural centers. As demonstrated with different combinations of Tàpies's works, politics inevitably plays a role in the content, context, space, and time of displaying art. Our perceptions of artistic exhibitions, in turn, can cause political ramifications in the future.

Is it a coincidence that Google decided to commemorate Antoni Tàpies on Friday, December 13, 2013? As far as I have been able to tell, it was an improvised act directly related to Mas's announcement on the previous day. What message did the 400 billion dollar company convey in celebrating the would-be birthday of a deceased Catalan artist the day after the President of the Generalitat made a controversial political announcement? It could have been an attempt to provide a less controversial accompaniment to the news, dealing with the same

⁸¹ Alonso argues that it is the result of a "thirty-year process of social engineering of a project" (beginning in the 1980s with Pujol and CiU's Catalanism), while Guibernau points to more recent events such as José María Aznar's "lack of response to demands for greater autonomy," the 2006 Autonomy Statute's revisions, and the high unemployment rate in 2013. Alonso, *El Catalanismo, del Éxito al Éxtasis*, 173; Guibernau, "Catalan Secessionism: Young People's expectations and Political Change," 112-113.

⁸² Barrio and Rodríguez Teruel, "¿Por qué se han radicalizado los partidos políticos en Cataluña?..."

geographic region. In a society where visual culture is rapidly converting into an increasingly technological aggregation of digital applications and advertisements, does the death of Tàpies mark the end of an era or the beginning of a major secession in Spain? While the Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió data has shown that support for independence decreased between 2012 and 2016⁸³, the party system has radicalized and that system has not necessarily aligned perfectly with voter opinions. Finally, when Madrileños turn on the evening news and see the enormous *Les quatre cròniques* (figure 4) looming in the background of presidential meetings in Barcelona's government headquarters, will they notice the historic content and contemporary significance of Tàpies's visualization of a Catalan nation? Probably not, partially because Tàpies's style has remained as ambiguous as it was under Franco's regime, but also because it is a banal form of hailing Catalan nationalist narratives. Beyond Catalonia, it does not seem to be such a powerful image. The mural that he made in 1990 could have been much more open in terms of political expression, yet the artist chose to continue working in the style that he developed in the 1950s and 1960s, leaving much to the imagination. As Miguel Ángel del Arco Blanco stated, we ought to consider not only the so-called real history but also the history of the imagined.⁸⁴ One could also add the failed or unfinished. While it is possible to trace the making of a work of art such as *Les quatre cròniques*, it is much more difficult to explain what goes on in the imaginations of its many beholders. However, that difficulty ought not to be ignored. The study of art should also include the history of the imagined, whether those ideas concern that of a nation or of an old sock depend on the individual work of art, the context of its exhibition, and the viewer's act of thinking.

⁸³ Baròmetre d'Opinió Política (BOP). 3^a onada 2012- REO 705, Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió; Baròmetre d'Opinió Política (BOP). 3^a onada 2016- REO 835, Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió.

⁸⁴ Del Arco Blanco, "Un paso más allá de la historia cultural: los *cultural studies*," 20.



8 Conclusion

“In a world where information circulates through ‘cool’ electronic transfers, there is only ‘hyperreality,’ not truth and falsity. This hyperreality looks the same in Los Angeles and Tokyo, London and New York. The vast distances of previous ages have disappeared, as information incessantly pulsates across the globe in nanoseconds.”

Michael Billig¹

This investigation has provided evidence as to why Antoni Tàpies became an iconic figure in Catalonia and the sociopolitical circumstances that surrounded his successful career as a working artist. The study has also analyzed examples of how different contexts affect the experience of seeing works of art and how political art can impact national thought. Finally, it has defined the relationship between art and politics using the work of Tàpies as a model while broadening the traditional perspective of academic studies concerning this subject. This concluding chapter revisits the initial questions, briefly reflects on cultural policies and the nature of art, and proposes some final questions while suggesting interesting themes for future investigations.

In “Un paso más allá de la historia cultural: los *cultural studies*” Miguel Ángel del Arco Blanco stated that studying culture “does not make sense without studying its interaction with politics and historical context in every moment.”² He later discussed how the understanding of time in cultural studies is useful for historians to think about history.³ Without looking at the political and historical circumstances surrounding Tàpies’s artwork, in combination with the way his images are able to transform at different intersections through space and time, much of his oeuvre would seem stagnant. As I have argued throughout this investigation, Tàpies’s style did not change after the mid 1950s, but the meaning of these artworks is inevitably changeable. Museums cannot present works in an impartial, neutral, or objective fashion, due to numerable factors that ultimately alter and shift meaning because art is a form of communication. Art depends on at least two parties where meaning can become transmuted in the transfer from the artist (via their artwork) to the beholder, ‘slippage’ in semiotics. While it is true that Tàpies’s

¹ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 131.

² Del Arco Blanco, “Un paso más allá de la historia cultural: los *cultural studies*,” 2.

³ *Ibid.*, 15.

style is tremendously consistent during the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, which seems surprising considering the sociopolitical changes that occurred during this period in Spain, his art is far from static. In fact, Tàpies adeptly left meaning up to the viewer. Even though his works may seem repetitive and resolute, he ultimately gave beholders dynamic works that prioritize the observer's liberty and power to decide what those works of art 'mean.'

Why did Tàpies create this peculiar style and continue to use it incessantly throughout the remainder of his career? The short answer is: this style worked for him and he found no need to change it. It was a style upon which he established his international career as a professional artist and did not fail to generate substantial public, large-scale projects during his lifetime. While few historians question the unchanging nature of Michelangelo's artistic style, for instance, since the early twentieth century there has been a tendency to compartmentalize phases of artistic production amongst modern artists and stylistic movements that is not always necessary.⁴ It seems that for a working artist, it would be as difficult (if not more difficult) to maintain the same style during half a century than to change a number of times. Working in the same style is not synonymous with settling within one's comfort zone, because the limitations of that zone are exhaustively explored. The more elaborate answer has to do with space and time. When the epicenter of the art world had just shifted from Paris to New York City after World War II, Tàpies socialized within what was left of shrinking avant-garde artist circles in Europe. His relationship with figures such as Joan Brossa helped him move away from his surrealist compositions of the late 1940s and early 1950s and pushed him towards another sort of style. What art historians now call Informalism was Tàpies's response to a less-than-normal childhood in Barcelona and the equally troubling political circumstances of his early career in Franco's Spain. Tàpies created his particular style under the regime that persecuted the use of Catalan, the artist's first language. He also formed this style at a time when Geometric Abstraction was no longer in the limelight of contemporary art shows. Abstract Expressionism of the New York School was capturing the attention of the world's leading art critics and buyers. Tàpies's generation was the last to have personal contact with the eminent vanguard circles that introduced Cubism, Futurism, Surrealism, and Dada to the world. Tàpies shared a fundamental

⁴ The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) founded in Manhattan in 1929 exemplified this sort of strict classification system under the leadership of its first director, Alfred H. Barr Jr.

principle in common with the leaders of each of these previous movements: art is not a mere representation of reality. Instead, it is a platform to think about reality and what exactly reality entails. Tàpies dedicated his entire career to producing works that would engage with the society in which he lived. At times that meant taking up issues concerning Catalan language and identity, but not always. His works also addressed experimentations within the context of contemporary art and social injustices that were reported in the global media. Tàpies continued to work into the early years of the twenty-first century without modifying his style. However, much had changed since he first began his artistic career in post Civil War Spain. After the death of Franco in 1975 and the transition to democracy, it was no longer necessary for Tàpies to veil his political opinions that he often expressed via his works of art. Despite this dramatic transformation, his artworks maintained a stern continuity with his previous compositions. This tremendous consistency ultimately demonstrated two points: that Tàpies was convinced that he had figured out the best way to communicate his ideas and that the inevitable contextual changes would give his artworks the dynamism that they otherwise lacked.

For example, the surface of *Forma negra sobre quadrat gris* [Black Form on a Gray Square] (1960, figure 64) looks similar to many of the artist's Matter Paintings. The rough texture and gloomy palette ultimately reflect the deficiency of the previous two decades, a dark and difficult era for many Spaniards under Franco's dictatorship. On the other hand, this same canvas can be understood in an entirely different manner. That small, dark gap at the bottom could be a keyhole into another world. It could be the portal to a fantastical space of lush gardens and colors, but we may never find out. We the viewers are provoked to imagine what lies beyond. When the artist said that he wanted his works to be like a springboard, this is exactly what he meant. They are not solutions to problems, nor are they unilateral encryptions. They are more like good adjectives, provoking feelings and describing the realm in which Tàpies lived, both real and imagined. The open-endedness of Tàpies's works ultimately privileges the beholder, giving them power and freedom to explore what the work could mean. For this reason, there was no need for Tàpies to change his style. His methods remained remarkably consistent, although those who look at his works are bound to change in space and time.

Why did Tàpies's artwork become iconic in Catalonia? Part of the reason that his artistic career began to soar in the 1970s was due to the style he created throughout the 1950s and 1960s.



Figure 64- Antoni Tàpies, *Forma negra sobre quadrat gris*, 1960

Beginning with the Matter Paintings, Tàpies's semi-abstract works captured the attention of an international audience eager to discover something new and different. The artist's contracts with Martha Jackson Gallery in New York City and Gallery Maeght in Paris assured his foreign exposure while important commissions from local political institutions augmented Tàpies's visibility in Catalonia. Tàpies's success within the international art scene paralleled his career on the local level. However, Barcelona is where Tàpies gained his iconic status and where politicians sought to project him as a model citizen. His early career demonstrated that he sought peaceful defiance against the Franco regime.

After the transition to democracy, he continued to work in the same fashion, privileging nontraditional aesthetics, experimental and everyday materials, and tactile surfaces. Via Fundació Antoni Tàpies, gallery shows, and public commissions, the artist simultaneously exhibited both unprecedented works and works that deal with Catalonia. His oeuvre became iconic for two reasons. The first is that he developed his signature style at a time when art

professionals were caught in a strange state of flux, not yet having fully embraced the American abstract expressionists nor completely having let go of the geometric abstraction that was popular in interwar Europe. Tàpies and his Matter Paintings gave critics and gallery owners something different to think about. His unique style would be written into the constructed history of art for its innovative yet familiar quality. In the realm of progressive artists of the twentieth century, Tàpies's work became iconic for his style and willingness to separate himself from the dwindling surrealist movement. Second, in addressing topics concerning Catalonia, Tàpies became beloved amongst important Catalan nationalists seeking to disseminate and legitimate the idea of a common history, language, culture, and identity shared throughout the region. Both the Generalitat de Catalunya and the Ajuntament de Barcelona worked to establish and maintain Tàpies's iconic images as representations of Catalan culture and global acclaim. The Generalitat's most important commission glorifies medieval texts, originally written in Catalan, and occupies a prominent position of tremendous media exposure in the autonomous government's headquarters in Barcelona. The Ajuntament de Barcelona, on the other hand, leaned towards Tàpies's less subjective works, supporting projects that did not necessarily contain exclusively Catalan content. Nevertheless, both institutions greatly contributed to the success, financial stability, and iconic status of Tàpies's works and the realization of the Fundació Antoni Tàpies. Furthermore, although to a much lesser extent, the Spanish government represented Tàpies as a model to promote Spain's diversity and modernity.

In the spring of 2014, the Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao exhibited Tàpies's *L'esperit català* (figure 6). The large painting that the collector María Josefa Huarte donated to the University of Navarra in 2008 was on loan to the Basque museum. *Eldiario.es* published an article about the showing of the work titled "*Bilbao muestra el Tàpies más comprometido políticamente con el catalanismo*" [Bilbao shows Tàpies's most politically committed work to Catalanism].⁵ The title is curious for the way it emphasized Bilbao (the place) as opposed to the actual museum showing the work. The city itself is the agent in the title, not the Museo de Bellas Artes nor Tàpies. The title also claims that *L'esperit català* is profoundly Catalanist, without providing any sort of clarification to what, exactly, that means. Although the article recognizes that the artwork was created in 1971, there is no distinction between the *catalanisme* of the early

⁵ "Bilbao muestra el Tàpies más comprometido políticamente con el catalanismo," *eldiario.es*, April 9, 2014, accessed January 9, 2015, http://www.eldiario.es/cultura/Bilbao-Tapias-comprometido-politicamente-catalanismo_0_247775813.html.

1970s and that of the twenty-first century. This could lead viewers to misinterpret the artwork. What was created as a protest against the cultural backwardness of the Franco dictatorship was reported in *eldiario.es* as a straightforward symbol of Catalan nationalism in 2014. However, the political options (including separation from Spain and further autonomy within Spain) that surround twenty-first century Catalanist movements share little in common with the year in which Tàpies made this work. Savvy beholders will not conceive of this artwork as a cry in support of separation from Spain. However, its 2014 exhibition in Bilbao may have led certain viewers to believe that it was (and is) an artwork that supports the separatist movement via its colors, symbols, words, and style. Regardless of how individuals come to understand the ‘meaning’ of this work of art, as an object it has come to form part of the visualization of a Catalan nation.

In *Goodbye Spain?* Kathryn Crameri discussed how contemporary documentaries mimic “recognizable patterns” of historic myths concerning Catalonia.⁶ These films trigger feelings quickly and their format allows for rapid, mass dissemination, as opposed to the generations that traditional tales and fables take to develop via storytelling. The three documentaries that she analyzed push for an independent Catalonia.⁷ Crameri also discussed the importance of the arts in the independence movement. “Cultural products are vital in this process not just because of their ability to disseminate the myth but also because of the way they speak to sentiment, in a way that history on its own cannot.”⁸ Artworks such as *L’esperit català* and *Les quatre cròniques* work in a similar fashion, using historic material to trigger emotive responses ultimately linking historic material (real or fictional) to feelings. The arts, or “cultural products,” create attitudes that, in turn, affect political actions. For this reason, the relationship between art and politics is a valuable field for investigation, especially when identities are concerned. Because of the sentimental nature of an individual’s identity, and the way they “personalize” the nation, the visual arts provide one of many ways in which these feelings become internalized, transformed, or questioned.⁹

The article in *Eldiario.es* claimed that *L’esperit català* was Tàpies’s most politically committed work to Catalanism. On the day of the artist’s death, Artur Mas similarly stated

⁶ Crameri, *Goodbye Spain?: The Question of Independence for Catalonia*, Kindle loc. 2243.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 2256.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 2256.

⁹ Quiroga, “The Three Spheres...,” 693.

“Tàpies was the artist with the most radically Catalan thoughts, expressions, and references.”¹⁰ I want to emphasize that both of these statements are opinions. In the case of Mas, it was more than a mere opinion; it was a statement to appropriate the figure of Tàpies and his work, aligning the artist with his party’s nationalizing agenda, as Jordi Pujol had done in the 1980s and 1990s. The way in which individuals experience works of art, as I have discussed in previous chapters, depends on many factors external to the actual artwork itself. In Bilbao in 2014 it is possible that *L’esperit català* seemed like Tàpies’s most Catalanist work. However, one could argue the same for his 2006 cover illustration for the *Estatut d’Autonomia de Catalunya*, among others that also directly address Catalan language, history, traditions, heroes, etc. Ultimately, the “most committed” is that which resonates the strongest with the emotive and intellectual nature of the viewer, something that can change over time and through space.

Returning to the question regarding how Tàpies’s art relates to Catalan nationalism, after having examined his style, public works, and late exhibitions, I would like to draw some conclusions. Tàpies’s ambivalent style enabled him to address sensitive topics (recall *A la memòria de Salvador Puig Antich*) under Franco’s dictatorship without causing the regime to persecute him. Support from local politicians and political institutions helped form the artist’s iconic status as an exemplary Catalan patriot. Tàpies’s foundation and his public works in and around Barcelona helped solidify his prominent status in the history of Catalan art. Museums like MNAC also sought to bolster the artist’s reputation, within a narrative that brought together centuries of artistic works from the region. Finally, Catalan nationalists from Jordi Pujol to Artur Mas have recognized the artist’s commitment to Catalan culture, putting Tàpies on a pedestal as a model citizen. His art has never specifically addressed separation from Spain. However, it could have been difficult *not* to interpret words like “liberty” scratched into the surface of his painting exhibited in Bilbao in 2014 without conjuring the secessionist movement, Mas’s referendum, or the radicalization of political parties in Catalonia. “Liberty,” in Tàpies’s 1971 *L’esperit català*, had nothing to do with independence from Spain. It was a cry for democracy and freedom from political authoritarianism, not for Catalonia’s liberation from Spain.¹¹ It is natural to connect objects from the past with the present or recent past; images have the ability to trigger emotions and memories quickly, sometimes making it difficult to situate objects

¹⁰ “Artur Mas: ‘Tàpies ha sido el artista más radicalmente catalán en su pensamiento, su expresión y sus referentes.’”

¹¹ Recall the slogan “Llibertat, amnistia, i Estat d’Autonomia” [Liberty, amnesty, and Statue of Autonomy] developed at the 1971 Assemblea de Catalunya advocating for political reforms in Spain. See: Appendix A.

historically. Montserrat Guibernau discussed one of the bonds between feelings and Catalan nationalism in “Nationalism and Intellectuals in Nations Without States,” stating that “emotional arguments in contemporary Catalan nationalism still hold live images of either their own or loved one’s experiences which may include: torture, imprisonment, exile, proscription, and the lack of freedom to cultivate their vernacular language and culture.”¹² However, it is important not to confuse the distinction between images and art of the past with matters and ideologies of the present.

Much has changed since Tàpies painted *L’esperit català*. Beyond the scope of Spain’s most significant political transformation since the onset of the Civil War in 1939, the role of art in society has also changed since the mid 1970s. One no longer needs to actually go to an exhibition in order to see pictures. In fact, we do not even need to wait for the morning paper to catch a glimpse of the latest artistic trends. Electronic media makes images available and reproducible, instantly, across the globe. This does not mean that seeing artworks such as *L’esperit català* hanging in a museum produces the same affect as does seeing a digitized version of the work. However, the nature of the practice and reception of art has significantly changed due to the omnipresence of images in electronic format that is now considered normal in ‘Western’ cultures. Furthermore, serious art is also competing for what Jorge Luis Marzo deemed “culture to make culture” in “La era de la degradación del arte y de la política cultural en Cataluña.”¹³ His examination of the politics of cultural administration in Catalonia concluded: “we have fattened a cultural policy that has wound up devouring culture itself.”¹⁴ He went on in the same text to state that instead of supporting cultural activities and professionals, Catalonia’s politics have made culture a *product* of its policies, reinforcing his idea of a “culture to make culture.” Marzo suggested that administrators working in the cultural sector ought to focus less on controlling content and more on keeping up with new technology that can help to preserve and make culture available to a wider public in a variety of formats. The same idea is applicable beyond Catalonia. However, this seems to be an increasingly difficult task to carry out in capitalist societies regardless of their geographical location. Once an image becomes accessible online, it enters into an indefinite space without classification or context. As Billig stated,

¹² Guibernau, “Nationalism and Intellectuals in Nations Without States...,” 24.

¹³ Jorge Luis Marzo, “La era de la degradación del arte y de la política cultural en Cataluña.” *Soymenos*, 2012. Accessed January 11, 2016, https://soymenos.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/la_degradacion_del_arte_en_catalunya1.pdf, 33.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

globalization has created a new way of life, “there is only ‘hyperreality,’ not truth and falsity.” This hyperreality does not change the basic human instinct to communicate, however it does change the manners in which we do. Culture and artistic expression change over time, the way we experience things also changes with time. Artistic institutions often seek to conserve and protect works of art, to educate the public about their creators and the circumstances of their existence; they stimulate thought and cultivate knowledge through the transmission and exhibition of culture in order to help others better understand its present and historical value.

Part of the difficulty in comprehending the value of art is due to its sensational qualities. Words, in comparison to images, often appear easier to perceive. However, this is not just because we think of words as having a single, fixed meaning. We are simply more accustomed to thinking about words than we are about pictures. Education is the first step to becoming more attuned to visual communication, and how formal characteristics (color, line, shape, style, texture, facture, etc.) can create meaning. Victoria Combalía expressed this topic in her call for the need of higher quality artistic education as a response to negative reviews of Tàpies’s *Monument Homenatge a Picasso*. Combalía understood that the criticism of the work stemmed from a lack of knowledge of contemporary art, a problem that other European countries did not tend to encounter, she argued.¹⁵ The solution to this problem is simple: educate children in the arts; teach them about artistic practices, trends, materials, and how to read visual languages. Joan M. Minguet Batllori proposed a new system, beginning with primary school and continuing through post-secondary education, in which students would be exposed to “the critical instruments to face the convulsed visuality of our times.”¹⁶ For both Combalía and Minguet, the focus was not to praise all works of art. Instead, both urged for a rethinking of the Catalan public education system so that beholders would be better equipped to read, interpret, and think critically about art and visual culture.

Before proposing some final questions and future areas for investigation, I want to return to one of the first images that I mentioned. It is a moving picture that is equally (or more) committed to Catalanism than any of Tàpies’s other works. *Pintura romànica i barretina* is a solemn representation that takes up themes of time, violence, history, and *Catalanisme*. The sociopolitical circumstances under which Tàpies created the work in 1971 shared little in

¹⁵ Combalía, “Un monumento polémico,” 22.

¹⁶ Minguet Batllori, *Contra la Cooltura; Art i política a Catalunya*, 69.

common with its 2013-2014 exhibition, as the cover piece of MNAC's *A Visit to the Romanesque. In company of Antoni Tàpies*. The artwork's open-endedness contributed to its relevance decades after its design. However, this feature simultaneously leaves the artwork exposed to interpretations that may have little to do with the political perspective with which Tàpies was working with during the early 1970s. Beyond forming part of an exhibition that situates the artist amongst a lineage of respected Catalan painters, *Pintura romànica i barretina* invites viewers to think about what the picture should (or should not) represent. In November



Figure 65- Photograph from the Wilson Initiative online magazine, 2012

2012, the Wilson Initiative published an online magazine including an image that resonates with Tàpies's red hat hanging from a rope (figure 65).¹⁷ An enormous Catalan flag takes up the majority of the photograph. In the foreground we see the head and shoulders of an anonymous figure in the center that is wearing a *barretina*. The age and gender of this person is unknown. Some ten meters away stands a row of people who are helping to hold up the other side of the flag, making sure it does not touch the ground. Behind the first row of people is a crowd, waving more than twenty smaller *senyeras* and *estelades*. The image cuts off the mob of people, however it is clear that the same scene continued far beyond the frame. Both Tàpies's *Pintura romànica i barretina* and this photograph share two important things in common: they highlight the *barretina* in the foreground as something special and unique to Catalonia and they have been politicized in order to represent an idea. MNAC sought to make a connection between Tàpies and its Romanesque collection, proposing the idea that Tàpies is part of a shared cultural tradition linked to the Catalan territory of the twenty-first century Autonomous Community. The Wilson Initiative, which was composed of nine academics who have advocated for the rights of the citizens of Catalonia to vote for independence "without fear or threats, and with as much information as possible,"¹⁸ used the photograph as a means of showing collaboration and solidarity amongst those who they believe are deserving of the opportunity to vote. Both these images could, in the future, be molded in order to illustrate other ideas. However, their original format and presentation ought not to be forgotten. The same goes for all works of art.

How will we read Tàpies's images differently in the future, for example on the celebration of his would-be hundredth birthday in December 2023? How will the future leaders of Catalonia (as an independent nation, autonomous community, or otherwise) project Tàpies as a historic figure? What sort of "stipulating" will contribute to his legacy as a great Catalan painter, and what details will be left behind?¹⁹ These are rhetorical questions, however, it is likely that as various circumstances change over time, so too will the exhibition and perception of Tàpies's artworks along with his image as a Catalan icon. Part of Tàpies's allure as an avant-garde artist and as an advocate for Catalan identity, lied in his ability to make others think. He took up social material and spun it in a way that forces viewers to reflect, because his images are

¹⁷ Wilson Initiative, Online Magazine, November 7, 2012, accessed January 12, 2016, <http://www.wilson.cat/en/revista-digital.html>, 10.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁹ Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 86.

not easy to read. *The New York Times* quoted the artist in his obituary, “my illusion is to have something to transmit... if I can’t change the world, at least I want to change the way people look at it.”²⁰ The images that Tàpies put forward work in order to open up conversations, debates, and further discussions. They also form part of contemporary Catalan culture, which is both directly and indirectly imbued with politics.

When I asked Toni Tàpies to describe his father and his greatest professional achievements, he responded that his dad was “passionate, hard-working, persistent, and convinced with what he was doing.”²¹ He was a driven artist with a clear social and political vision of the world, which he expressed via his works of art. As a whole, his works demonstrate each of these characteristics. Toni reflected on his father’s accomplishments in and beyond Catalonia:

I think that in general you can say that the presence of my father’s oeuvre in the art of the second half of the twentieth century is something that is indisputable. If someone wants to write the history of art... they would have to talk about my father, and this is not easy. It is not easy for an artist to have the genius and creativity to be recognized amongst the great number of artists from around the globe. In addition, his perseverance and his desire to work and communicate, to send a message to the world of hope in reality, to try to help humanity to overcome adversity, fear, uncertainty, is something that he intended to do from the outset. No artist has been able to fix the problems of the world, but at least I think it is important to try to do so.²²

Toni’s words echo those of his father that were published in *The New York Times* article. The point of creating and recreating his ideas in visual terms was always a deeply personal exercise for Tàpies. His objectives were not tangible but ideological. He wanted to change the way his beholders envisioned the world and he achieved this through visual art.

Pepe Serra and Joan Guitart also had similar responses when I asked each of them to reflect on Tàpies’s greatest achievement. Serra stated “his career; he was continually present, continually working and constantly experimenting.”²³ MNAC’s director went on to express his esteem for the artist’s radicalism, his international reputation, and unique personal language. He acknowledged the fact that it may take some more time for society (beyond the realm of the

²⁰ Grimes, “Antoni Tàpies, Spanish Abstract Painter, Dies at 88.”

²¹ Interview with Toni Tàpies, February 4, 2016.

²² Ibid.

²³ Interview with Pepe Serra, June 27, 2016.

culture sector) to come to recognize the value of Tàpies's pictorial language. Nevertheless, he proclaimed that Tàpies was "the most important artist of the second half of the twentieth century in Spain, for me, and without a doubt in Catalonia."²⁴ Guitart said, "Tàpies's greatest achievement was *la coherencia*, in his works of art as well as his discourse."²⁵ *La coherencia*, in this case could be translated as the coherence or consistency of the artist. Both would be indicative of Guitart's positive view of Tàpies and the cohesive nature of his work.

Manuel Borja-Villel, like the artist's son and Pepe Serra, found that Tàpies's "work is fundamental in order to understand other works of art created during the second half of the twentieth century."²⁶ Perhaps, however, art historian Katherine Jentleson most accurately captures Tàpies's greatest achievement through her statement which links the artist to one of Picasso's most remarkable pieces: "Even in the most desolate periods of Franco-era Spain, there was life after *Guernica*."²⁷

The objectives of this investigation are specifically oriented towards the works of Antoni Tàpies, but they also seek to provide an exemplary perspective for future studies concerning the relationship between art and politics, especially nationalism and national identity. Nationalist ideologies have profound effects on artistic creation, while art also impacts political movements. The relationship between art and nationalism in Catalonia is bilateral. Tàpies created works of art that were often in response to social and political issues and events; he used art as a means of expressing his ideas. Public exhibitions and commissions tied many of his works directly to the world of politics. Tàpies, through the support of the Generalitat de Catalunya, the Ajuntament de Barcelona, the Spanish state, and a number of cultural institutions, built a visual language that addresses both national identity and ideology. That language was reinforced and, at times, contested. It looked very different from that of Joan Miró, yet the two men shared similar ideas. Future visualizations of Catalonia will also be juxtaposed to the works of these two artists. Differing historical circumstances will shape the ways in which new visual languages will be developed and perceived, yet they will always be a product of a political nature and will affect the viewer's understanding of what is 'normal.'

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Interview with Joan Guitart, July 12, 2016.

²⁶ Ceus, "Tàpies, más allá de la pintura."

²⁷ Jentleson, "Antoni Tàpies...."

The success of *Les quatre cròniques* and failure of the original *Mitjó* project are a testament to the fragile relationship between art and politics. Tàpies's political art had (and continues to have) the potential to impact national ideologies, particularly in the context of contemporary exhibitions. In Catalonia, major events shape the creation of art and, as part of a wider culture that is increasingly visual, art plays a role in the shifting definition of what it means to be or feel Catalan. As Barrio and Rodríguez Teruel outlined, “the stability and change in the party system and the stability and change in the electorate are related but not mutually equivalent.”²⁸ In other words, Catalonia's party system does not exactly correlate with its voters' opinions, but they are related. Citizens' thoughts are directly related, however, to the ways in which they come to personalize the nation. Part of that personalization comes from the visual realm, including works of art. Cramerer stated in *Goodbye Spain?*, the “relation between Catalan politics and civil society is both complex and reciprocal.”²⁹

This investigation sketches a general model that shows how politics have a direct impact on the creation of what Tàpies, amongst others, considered ‘good’ art, as a form of culture that deliberately and relentlessly engages with social and political life. This sort of art, via its exhibition, has the ability to heighten emotions and alter conceptions concerning contemporary issues, which affect the way that citizens view the world. Thoughts and feelings generated through art are not always passive; they can and do transform both real and imagined realities. While further analysis is necessary in order to better understand the nature of such complexities in and beyond Spain, the social role of art makes it inseparable from politics and it can tell us much about the iceberg that lies beneath the surface of the glistening water that conceals the mass below.

²⁸ Barrio and Rodríguez Teruel, “¿Por qué se han radicalizado los partidos políticos en Cataluña?...,” 5.

²⁹ Cramerer, *Goodbye Spain?: The Question of Independence for Catalonia*, Kindle loc. 1203.





Appendix A: Entrevista con Toni Tàpies en Barcelona el 4 de Febrero de 2016

Emily Jenkins (EJ): ¿Como describiría a su padre con cinco adjetivos?

Toni Tàpies (TT): Cinco adjetivos... te voy a decir algunas cosas que no son necesariamente adjetivos. Era un artista muy trabajador; para él el trabajo era muy importante, se planteaba su trabajo como si fuera un profesional en otro ámbito, trabajaba cada día, incluso a veces los sábados y los domingos también, porque el arte era su vida y su trabajo, muy trabajador.

Era una persona del otro lado muy pasional, lo que el hacia lo hacia con mucha pasión... ¿que mas se podría decir? Bueno, estaba muy convencido de lo que el hacia, tenía una idea muy clara de lo que el quería, y de lo que tenía que hacer, siempre lo tuvo. Quizás cuando era más joven, era más inseguro, pero siempre tuvo esta idea de que tenía algo que decir y que tenía que decirlo con el arte.

Era una persona muy cultivada culturalmente, venía de una familia de la burguesía media, pero su padre tenía bastante inquietud cultural, aunque sorprende, como mi padre, de una forma muy autodidacta, porque él estudio derecho en la universidad hasta el ultimo año, luego lo dejó. Mí abuelo quería que fuese abogado como él, pero mi padre no, no quiso. Sorprende como de una forma muy autodidacta, porque apenas fue a una escuela de arte, se hizo con una gran cultura, no solo artística, no solo pictórica, si no musical, literaria, le gustaba mucho el cine, los libros le gustaban mucho.

Finalmente como última característica diría el aspecto de coleccionista, le gustaba coleccionar arte de todos los tiempos y de todas las culturas, esta era su otra pasión. Una pasión era los libros, libros antiguos y contemporáneos, tenía muchos también. Luego le gustaba coleccionar obras de arte, ya sea un poco de aquellos que el consideraba sus maestros, o arte primitivo africano, arte precolombino, arte oriental, japonés, chino, india, Oceanía, de los indios americanos, un poco de todo el mundo y de todas las épocas, de Egipto, esto era su gran pasión.

Apasionado, trabajador, persistente, y muy convencido de lo que estaba haciendo.

EJ: Como director de la galería Toni Tàpies, ¿a usted ha pensado en como quiere que futuros generaciones vienen a conocer y a valorar el trabajo de su padre como artista y también como persona?

TT: Bueno, en realidad la institución que creo que tendrá mas futuro y proyección para este cometido, para poder mostrar su trabajo, su pensamiento, su persona, es la Fundació Tàpies. Mi padre quiso crear precisamente esta fundación para, no solo preservar parte de su obra que él donó a esta fundación, sino para crear también una biblioteca, de la cual dio una buena parte, que se ha ido incrementando con el tiempo. También quiso que fuese un centro donde otros artistas pudieran exponer, de manera que fuera un centro vivo, no solo dedicado a su obra como una especie de mausoleo sino algo vivo que pudiera tener un largo futuro.

Mi galería hace y ha hecho el trabajo que ha podido, yo esta galería la abrí hace mas de veinte años, al principio sobretodo exponía obra gráfica, grabados, litografías que editaba de distintos artistas; luego ya hice un trabajo mas de galería representando, llegue a representar quizás quince artistas distintos, no solo españoles, también de otros países. Pero desde que murió mi padre en 2012, tuve que concentrarme en su legado, en el control de los derechos de imagen, en el tema de los certificados de autenticidad, y he reducido un poco la actividad de la galería, centrándome básicamente en su trabajo. Hacemos pequeñas exposiciones, como la que hay ahora, pero con un ritmo un poco irregular e intentando llevar también la gestión de sus exposiciones con otras galerías, y también si hay un cliente que se interesa por una obra.

EJ: Actualmente no estas con otros artistas, ni en el futuro...?

TT: No, no lo creo.

EJ: En 1976 su padre ha escrito “cuando una artista encuentra su voz es para ejercerla con continuidad.”¹ Durante y después de la transición, me parece remarcable la consistencia de estilo que ha mantenido en sus obras, considerando la magnitud de cambios sociopolíticos en España. No quiero decir que no haya cambiado como artista, pero (sobre todo hablando de estilo a partir

¹ Tàpies, *La realidad como arte*, 85.

de la mitad de los años cincuenta) me parece que la consistencia en su obra es algo realmente tremendo. ¿Esta usted de acuerdo?

Pregunto porque existe historiadores a los que les gusta mucho separar una época de otras, muchas veces va por décadas y esto creo que no es así, la obra es continua.

TT: Exacto, estoy de acuerdo. Evidentemente un artista y más un artista como mi padre que trabajo durante cincuenta años seguidos, cinco décadas de trabajo, evidentemente hay una evolución. Quizás en los primeros años cincuenta y sesenta es cuando él probablemente estaba más preocupado por establecer su lenguaje, y una vez ha hecho esto, quizás adquiere una mayor libertad, sobretodo en las ultimas décadas, en el sentido en que él a veces hizo un cuadro que parece mas clásico, otro que parece mas reciente, tiene un estilo mas abierto quizás. Es cierto que durante esta época que hablas de transición política y durante el franquismo, él siempre tuvo una postura política de defensa de la democracia y en esos momentos en que era muy difícil o imposible expresar una opinión política en España, porque había una dictadura y venia la policía y te metía en prisión, su manera de expresar muchas veces era con la pintura, quizás en aquellos años si que hay una expresión mas política en su obra, a veces bastante clara, luego quizás queda un poco más diluido, pero él siempre tuvo unas convicciones sociales y políticas que siempre defendió desde el principio al final, y creo que se ve a lo largo de toda su obra.

EJ: En 1976 ha hecho un poster para el PSUC y en el mismo año ha publicado que no es necesario hablar de entrar o salir de un partido político si lo llevas dentro.² ¿Ha apoyado exclusivamente el PSUC en estos años? y después de la disolución del partido en 1987?

TT: Mi padre nunca fue militante de un partido político porque el quería guardar su libertad de pensamiento, lo que ocurre es que durante la época del franquismo el PSUC en Cataluña era un partido muy activo, muy activa la defensa de la democracia, muy activa la defensa de derechos sociales, y muy activa también la defensa de la recuperación de la autonomía de la nación catalana; con eso mi padre estaba de acuerdo, y aunque como decía nunca llego a militar sí que tenía amigos conocidos que militaban en la clandestinidad en esa época, que le pedían a veces si

² Ibid., 84.

podía hacer un cartel, si podía donar un dibujo para recaudar fondos, y esto sí, siempre lo hizo. Luego ya, cuando llegó la democracia el PSUC también fue cambiando, todo ha cambiado, ahora ni siquiera se presenta, gente que estuvo en el PSUC ahora ya están en otro partido. Pero en esa época el PSUC era como el centro de la resistencia, para la democracia y para Cataluña en España.

EJ: En 1981, durante una inauguración en París, Jordi Pujol ha nombrado a su padre entre los grandes artistas del región (Tàpies siendo el más joven de la lista)³ y en 2012, Artur Mas ha dicho “su estilo ha quedado asociado para siempre a una forma especialmente genuina de expresar la catalanidad.”⁴ ¿Su padre expresaba opiniones sobre el CiU, Pujol, o Mas?

TT: Mi padre no creo que expresara en público ninguna tipo de opinión especial, yo creo que el respetaba a los políticos que hacían su trabajo; hoy en día no se que pensaría después de todo lo que se ha visto, en especial entorno a la familia Pujol, supongo que estaría un poco decepcionado a la espera de ver realmente lo que ha pasado, pero en aquel momento a él le parecían políticos que hacían su trabajo y que de alguna modo defendían la autonomía de Cataluña, aunque supongo que él consideraría estos partidos un poco a la derecha para su modo de pensar. Pero no creo que públicamente expresara demasiado este tema, en privado sería otra cuestión, no le gustaba demasiado, una vez recuperada la democracia opinar sobre un político, otro político, en privado sí.

EJ: El día después del muerte de Joan Miró, su padre ha publicado en *La Vanguardia* que trata del mundo del Miró, dice que forma parte de “una nueva visión del mundo, una manera de entender la vida, una manera de vivir más honda y más justa, en la que va incluida, evidentemente, nuestra libertad tanto individual como nacional. Y no es extraño que en este sentido Miró tuviera tan arraigada la necesidad de defender el espíritu catalán, nuestras libertades, nuestra cultura...”⁵ ¿Que habrá significado para su padre en 1983 “libertad nacional”? Claro que es distinto de hoy...

³ Pujol, Discurso en la sede la UNESCO en París, 115-117.

⁴ “Artur Mas: “Tàpies ha sido el artista más radicalmente catalán....”

⁵ Tàpies, *La realidad como arte*, 266.

TT: Yo diría que tanto en el 83, como antes, para mi padre defender la libertad nacional de Cataluña, por decirlo de alguna modo, era algo casi sinónimo a defender la democracia en España; porque históricamente Cataluña había sido una nación basada en una monarquía, pero una monarquía bastante avanzada para la época, porque era una especie de monarquía parlamentaria, había como un parlamento, el rey era rey, pero había el parlamento de ciudadanos que de alguna modo podían contrarrestar el poder del rey, después, cuando viene la dinastía borbónica se pierde y se adopta un sistema en España de poder absoluto, central y se pierde todo esto. Para mi padre, cuando él defendía recuperar los derechos nacionales de Cataluña, era un poco como decir recuperar la democracia no solo en Cataluña sino en España, con un modelo que es un modelo antiguo pero podía ser un modelo ideal para España. Supongo que la república para él era lo mas normal, pero al menos una monarquía parlamentaria, como existe hoy en día, aunque habría que acabar de solucionar algunas cosas.

EJ: En 2003 Montserrat Guibernau ha dicho algo parecido, que el trabajo de Miró, Gaudí, Dalí, Tàpies y Casals ha sido convertido en símbolos de la identidad catalana.⁶ ¿Estas usted de acuerdo?

TT: Bueno sí, esto suele ocurrir, y más en un país pequeño como Cataluña, que lucha todavía por afirmar su identidad. Cuando surgen personajes como Miró, mi padre, como Casals, como Gaudí, se tiende a utilizarlos un poco como proyección de nuestra cultura. Esto se ha hecho, y supongo que se continuará haciendo, se cogen como modelos, para decir, mira son potentes en cultura. Se ha utilizado el nombre de Tàpies, de Gaudí, y una serie de personajes mas para proyectar esta imagen de Cataluña.

EJ: *Les quatre cròniques* era originalmente para otra sala en la Generalitat pero se ha recolocado, me parece en el año 1992, puede ser...?

TT: No me acuerdo exactamente, no te podría decir. Se que fue un encargo que se hizo para la Generalitat, lo que no sé decirte si estaba pensada para otra sala, es posible, está en la sala donde se reúne el gobierno catalán, siempre sale en las noticias.

⁶ Guibernau, "Nationalism and Intellectuals in Nations without States...", 25.

EJ: He encontrado una foto de él firmando unos papeles para hacer el encargo, tenía curiosidad por saber si ellos eligieron el tema...

TT: No, no, el tema no. Le pidieron que hiciera un mural y él eligió este tema de los cuatro cronistas históricos de Cataluña. Supongo que le pareció que evidentemente era un tema muy adecuado para la situación, pero no le habían pedido específicamente que hiciera algo sobre esto.

EJ: Simplemente que era para el espacio...

TT: Sí que hiciera algo para un espacio.

EJ: En la fundación existe una caja blanca llena de fotocopias de artículos de la prensa sobre el *Mitjó*, todo el proceso e intervenciones políticos parece absurdos como era, en principio, una idea de los directivos de MNAC para hacer una comisión por Tàpies. ¿Recuerdas como reaccionaba su padre cuando el proyecto estaba siendo debatido entre políticos, instituciones, y la prensa? ¿Como sentía?

TT: Sí que lo recuerdo. A mi padre lo que peor le sentó que desde la instancia del MNAC se le pidió hacer un proyecto para la Sala Oval, y cuando él presentó su pequeña maqueta (que existe todavía, el calcetín) alguien en el MNAC dijo nosotros no hemos pedido nada a Tàpies... lo ha hecho porque ha querido, y el proyecto se termino aquí. Si él hizo algo fue porque le habían encargado hacer algo, no porque él tuviera una idea de hacer algo allí, es absurdo. Esto le siento mal porque parecía que alguien decía Tàpies esta haciendo algo aquí que nadie le ha pedido, y esto es falso. Luego mas bien creo que le divirtió un poco leer toda la cantidad de historias que se llegaron a publicar en la prensa, la mayor parte muy ridículas, que de alguna modo indican un poco el nivel cultural y artístico de este país, cuando probablemente en otro país esto sería algo normal que nadie hubiera remarcado demasiado, aquí se convirtió en un tema estrella del mundo de la prensa, la televisión, se hicieron bromas, se hicieron caricaturas.

EJ: Es curioso que digas eso porque justamente *The New York Times* publicó algo sobre el *Mitjó* y proyectaba Barcelona como una ciudad más culta por tener ese tipo de discusión pública sobre el *Mitjó*. Yo estoy más de acuerdo contigo, que era ya un nivel...

TT: ...sí era un nivel muy bajo, a mi la polémica me parece siempre correcta, no tengo nada que decir, pero se llegaron a decir verdaderas barbaridades. La escultura pública siempre es polémica porque no gusta a todo el mundo, hay vecinos que viven allí y que la ven cada día y les molesta, otros que no van a verla nunca, a veces impide el acceso; recuerdo esculturas de Richard Serra, por ejemplo, que fueron polémicas simplemente porque hacían de barrera para los vecinos, o eran peligrosas incluso. La escultura pública siempre va a ser polémica, pero la polémica que se hizo aquí fue a unos niveles muy bajos de análisis artístico.

EJ: A usted, siendo poeta y dueño de una galería, ¿cómo ves el papel de los políticos en relación al arte contemporáneo?

TT: El papel de los políticos en el arte contemporáneo es un poco, bastante irregular y no siempre es de un nivel muy alto. Los políticos en general suelen utilizar al arte un poco en sus intereses, hay que vigilar no caer en sus manos. A veces a un artista le puede interesar también, por ejemplo, cuando hablábamos del PSUC, mi padre sí que tenía una afinidad, y había una sinergia para conseguir algo mejor. Hoy en día yo creo que el artista tiene que estar un poco a parte de la política, porque sino acaba perdiendo su libertad, esto no quiere decir que individualmente no pueda tener sus opciones políticas, pero yo creo que manteniendo una cierta distancia, porque como digo, con excepciones, en general los políticos de arte contemporáneo no entienden demasiado en este país.

EJ: Su padre hecho una portada de *l'Estatut d'Autonomia de Catalunya*. ¿A usted sabe si ha sido una pedida o simplemente algo que a él quería hacer?

TT: Normalmente cuando hacia este tipo de cosas lo hacia por que se lo pedían. Sí, sí, esto se lo encargaron.

EJ: Su obra, tanto como sus palabras escritas, privilegian la ambigüedad y muchas veces dan la oportunidad al individuo para pensar y reflexionar sobre ellos. A la vez, existe obras que muestra su apoyo a ciertas iniciativas. Está claro que era antifranquista. A usted le consideraría como catalanista en todo momento y que significaba (para él) el catalanismo?

TT: Un poco era lo que explicábamos, para él defender el catalanismo era defender un modelo de entender la vida política de un país donde no hubiera un poder absoluto, sino que hubiera un parlamento que pudiera contrarrestar el poder absoluto de un rey. Esto es lo que ocurría en Cataluña en la edad media, Cataluña fue uno de los primeros países en tener una constitución, defender esto era defender, en aquella época, algo que en España no existía todavía, y en ese sentido mi padre era un nacionalista catalán.

EJ: ¿Recuerda si tenía un opinión sobre la reconstrucción de *Les Quatre Columnes* en 2010?

TT: No, esto no creo. Ya era muy mayor, solo lo debía leer en la prensa. Supongo que el opinaría que si se había hecho así, estaba bien recuperarlo, pero no recuerdo que hubiésemos hablado mucho sobre este tema.

EJ: En 2013 Google ha hecho un homenaje a Tàpies utilizando un imagen de una de sus obras. ¿Usted sabía que iban usarlo antes?

TT: No, no, fue una sorpresa.

EJ: Curioso, ¿es bajo derecho hacer eso, se puede hacer eso...?

TT: Sí, sí curioso... bueno me imagino que debieron pedir alguna derecho, pero yo me enteré el día que salió, me llamaron diciéndome que mirase Google, miré y lo vi, era la silla. No lo sabía.

EJ: ¿Ha expresado opiniones sobre el movimiento separatista en Cataluña? ¿Habría participado en 9N su padre?

TT: ¿Hoy en día...? no lo se. Para mi padre lo que era muy importante, en su época, era que España volviera a ser un país democrático, con un parlamento, que pudiera ser, más o menos, equivalente a otros países europeos, y que se respetará la autonomía de Cataluña, como se hizo durante unos años, luego ha habido una involución, desde Madrid se ha intentado recuperar cosas que ya se habían cedido a Cataluña, hoy en día todo este tema que él no lo vivió, porque ya había fallecido, y no sé que pensaría la verdad. Yo personalmente pienso que es una pena no haber encontrado antes un sistema que pudiera hacer que las distintas naciones que puedan formar España estuvieran unidas, encontrar más lo que nos une que lo que nos separa. Esto no ha sido posible en gran parte por culpa de gobiernos de Madrid, que siempre han tratado de minusvalorar la lengua catalana, incluso de humillar en muchos momentos la cultura catalana, y estamos pagando una factura que es una pena. Creo que mi padre hubiese dicho, que pena que desde el principio no se haya podido canalizar esto para que no tengamos que llegar a esta situación, me imagino que habría pensado esto.

EJ: El Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya usaba el cuadro *Pintura romànica i barretina* (1971) como portada en el anuncio de la exhibición *Visita al romànic, En companyia de Antoni Tàpies*. ¿A usted que le parecía este cuadro y a la exhibición?

TT: Es un cuadro que es divertido, él cogió una pieza románica, sin demasiado valor e hizo esta intervención, un poco como homenaje a una cierta época de Cataluña. A él siempre le había impactado mucho el arte románico catalán, y aquí en el MNAC hay algunas obras de románico catalán muy, muy importantes, quizás de lo más importante que hay en Barcelona a nivel de museos.

EJ: ¿Y la de *Tàpies des de l'interior* unos meses antes? Si no me equivoco, expondrán la obra *Parla, Parla* (1992) de nuevo como parte de una exhibición de la fundación en 2016. ¿Que le ha parecido?

TT: Esto fue una exposición con muchas obras, una parte se expuso en la fundación y otra en el MNAC, y después hubo una versión un poco más reducida, que se expuso en Miami, en el Perez Museum.

Yo personalmente creo que había quizás demasiadas obras en esa exposición, pero fue el criterio del comisario y evidentemente se respetó su criterio.

EJ: ¿Crees que era por el sitio, las salas que se han elegido, o simplemente querían dar más ejemplos de cada momento? Comenzaba con sus obras más antiguas y seguía cronológicamente...

TT: No creo que fuese un problema del espacio. Yo personalmente si hubiera hecho una exposición así, hubiera sido más selectivo, hubiera puesto menos piezas y con un poco más de espacio para cada una.

EJ: La que se hizo en el mismo año en 2013 en el Guggenheim Bilbao, tengo curiosidad si se eligió Bilbao por algo, porque tenía más relación con Nueva York, como tuvo varias exhibiciones allí, quizás fue por mover las obras físicamente...

TT: Esto fue un encargo del Guggenheim Bilbao, pidió hacer una exposición de objetos y esculturas, y se hizo así, nunca se nos dio la opción de hacerlo en Nueva York.

EJ: Finalmente, pregunto ¿que crees que ha sido el mejor logro profesional de su padre?

TT: Yo creo que en general se puede decir que la presencia de la obra de mi padre en el arte contemporáneo de la segunda mitad del siglo XX es algo incontestable. Si alguien quiere escribir la historia del arte de la segunda mitad del siglo XX tiene que hablar de mi padre y eso no es nada fácil; no es nada fácil que un artista tenga la genialidad y la creatividad como para que se le pueda reconocer entre tantos artistas como hay en el mundo. Y luego también su perseverancia y sus ganas de trabajar y de comunicar, de dar un mensaje al mundo de esperanza en realidad, de intentar ayudar a la humanidad a superar problemas, miedos, incertidumbres, es algo que se propuso desde el principio. Ninguna artista ha conseguido arreglar los problemas del mundo, pero al menos creo que es importante intentarlo.

English Translation of Interview with Toni Tàpies in Barcelona on February 4, 2016

Emily Jenkins (EJ): How would you describe your father using five adjectives?

Toni Tàpies (TT): Five adjectives... I will tell you some things that are not necessarily adjectives. He was a hard-working artist; work was very important to him, he approached his work as if he were a professional in another sector, he worked everyday, sometimes including the weekends, because art was his life and job, he was a very hard-worker.

He was, at the same time, very passionate, what he did he did so with passion.... what more can I say? Well, he was very convinced with what he worked on, he had clear ideas about what he wanted, and what he needed to do, he always had. I suppose when he was younger, he was more insecure, but he always knew that he had ideas to express and he had to express them with his artwork.

He was a culturally cultivated person, he came from a bourgeoisie family, but his father was quite concerned with culture, although surprisingly like my father, in a self-taught way, because he studied law in the university until the final year, then he abandoned the degree. My grandfather wanted him to be a lawyer like himself, but my father did not want to. Remarkably teaching himself, because he did not even attend an art school, he became versed in a great deal of cultural areas, not just artistic or visual culture, but also music and literature; he truly enjoyed watching films and reading books.

Finally as the last characteristic I would say was his passion for collecting. He liked to collect from different periods and cultures. He loved to collect books, antique books although he had many contemporary books as well. He also enjoyed collecting artworks, from artists whom he considered to be masters as well as primitive African art, pre-sColumbian art, Asian art, Indian art, Native American art, a little from the whole world throughout history, from Egypt as well, this was his great passion.

Passionate, hard-working, persistent, and convinced with what he was doing.

EJ: As director of the Gallery Toni Tàpies, have you thought of how you would like future generations to learn about and value the work of your father as an artist and as a person?

TT: Well, actually the institution that I think will have more of an impact in this area, in order to show his work, his thoughts, his character, is the Fundació Tàpies. My father wanted to create this foundation, not just to preserve some of his own works that he donated, but also to create a library that includes his own books and the rest has expanded over time. He wanted it to be a center where other artists could show their works, so that it would be an active center, not simply dedicated to his works like a mausoleum, but a lively space that would have a long future.

My gallery is doing, and has done, the work it could. I opened it more than twenty years ago, at first it was oriented to show graphic works, prints, and lithographs from a number of different artists. Later, it became a gallery representing various artists, maybe fifteen artists, not just Spanish artists, from other countries as well. However, since my father's death in 2012, I had to concentrate on his legacy, the control of his intellectual property, the management of certifications and authentication of his artworks. For this reason, I have toned down the activity in the gallery, concentrating basically in his artwork. We have small exhibitions, like the one on display now, but with an irregular program (as we also manage the works on loan to other galleries and clients with interests in purchasing specific works).

EJ: Currently, you are not representing any other artists... nor in the future?

TT: No, no I do not believe so.

EJ: In 1976 your father wrote “when an artist finds their voice, it is to execute it with continuity.”⁷ During and after the transition, the stylistic consistency that your father maintained in his artworks seems remarkable, considering the magnitude of sociopolitical changes that were happening in Spain. I do not want to say that he did not change as an artist, but particularly speaking about style after the mid 1950s, the continuity of his works is rather tremendous. Do

⁷ Tàpies, *La realidad como arte*, 85.

you agree? I wanted to ask because there are art historians that like to create temporal separations, often corresponding to decades, and I do not think that is correct, his works have continuity.

TT: Exactly, I agree. Evidently an artist (particularly an artist like my father) who worked for more than fifty years straight, five decades of work, clearly goes through an evolution. Perhaps in the 1950s and 1960s is when he was most concerned with establishing his language, and once he had solidified it, he probably felt that he had more freedom, especially during his last decades, in the sense that sometimes he would make a more classical work or another that would seem more contemporary, I suppose he had a more open style. It is true that during the time you speak about, during the political transition and during Franco's dictatorship, he always defended democratic values and during the times when it was difficult or impossible to express political opinions in Spain, because there was a dictator and the police would come and put you in jail, his way of expressing himself was often through his paintings, perhaps during those years his works contained more political connotations, sometimes quite obvious, later perhaps a little more diluted, but he always had social and political convictions that he always defended from the beginning to the end, and I think that you can see that throughout his entire oeuvre.

EJ: In 1976, your father made a poster for the PSUC and in the same year he published that it is not necessary to enter or exit a political party if you carry it with you.⁸ Did he exclusively support the PSUC at this time? What about after the party's dissolution in 1987?

TT: My father was never a militant of any political party because he wanted to maintain his liberty of thought, what happened is that during the Franco dictatorship the PSUC in Catalonia was a very active party, very active in the defense of democracy, very active in the defense of social rights, and very active in defending the recuperation of regional autonomy of the Catalan nation as well; my father agreed with all of these causes, and while he never officially joined the party, he did have good friends who participated in the clandestine group during this period. They sometimes asked him if he would make a poster, or donate an artwork to sell to help finance the organization, and he always did. Later, once democracy was established, the PSUC changed, everything had changed, now it does not even exist, people that were in the PSUC are now in

⁸ Ibid., 84.

another party. But at that time, the PSUC was like the center of the resistance, in favor of democracy for Catalonia in Spain.

EJ: In 1981, during an inauguration in Paris, Jordi Pujol named your father among the great artists of the region (Tàpies being the youngest of the list)⁹ and in 2012 Artur Mas said, “his style has stayed forever associated with an especially genuine form of expressing Catalan identity.”¹⁰ Did your father express opinions about the CiU, Pujol, or Mas?

TT: I do not think that my father publically spoke about any of these figures specifically, I think that he respected politicians that did their jobs; today I am not sure what he would think after everything that has happened, especially revolving around the Pujol family, I suppose that he would be a little disappointed while waiting to see what actually happened, but in that moment he believed that politicians were just doing their jobs and that, in a way, they defended Catalonia’s autonomy, although I suppose that he would consider these parties a little conservative for his own way of thinking. But I do not think he publically expressed such opinions concerning this topic, in private it is another question, he did not like the coalition very much, and once democracy was reestablished, he would express his thoughts concerning particular politicians in private.

EJ: On the day following the death of Joan Miró (December 25, 1983), your father published in *La Vanguardia* about Miró’s world, he said it formed part of “a new vision of the world, a way of understanding life, a way of living more fully and justly, with which goes included, evidently, both our individual and national liberty. And it is not surprising that in this sentiment, Miró was profoundly tied to the need to defend our Catalan spirit, our liberties, our culture....”¹¹ What would “national liberty” have meant for your father in 1983? And later on?

TT: I would say that for my father in 1983, just as before, defending Catalonia’s national liberty was, in a way, practically synonymous with defending the democracy in Spain; because historically Catalonia was a nation led by a monarchy, but a rather advanced monarchy for the

⁹ Pujol, Discurso en la sede la UNESCO en París, 115-117.

¹⁰ “Artur Mas: ‘Tàpies ha sido el artista más radicalmente catalán....’”

¹¹ Tàpies, *La realidad como arte*, 266.

time, because it was a sort of parliamentary monarchy, there was a parliament, the king was king, but there was the parliament of citizens that could somehow counter the power of the king, later, when the Bourbon dynasty came to power it was lost and an absolute monarchy was established in Spain, central, and all that was lost. For my father, when he defended the recuperation of national rights in Catalonia, it was similar to defending the recuperation of democracy not only in Catalonia but also in Spain, with a model that is an historic model that could have also been an ideal model for Spain. I suppose that a republic (for him) was the most normal option, at least a parliamentary monarchy, like it exists today, although some problems need to be solved.

EJ: In 2003 Montserrat Guibernau said something similar, that the works of Miró, Gaudí, Dalí, Tàpies, and Casals have been converted into symbols of Catalan identity.¹² Do you agree?

TT: Well, yes, this tends to happen, and more so in a small country like Catalonia that is still fighting to affirm its identity. When figures emerge like Miró, my father, like Casals, like Gaudí, there is a tendency to use them a bit as a projection of our culture. This has been done, and I suppose it will continue to be done, they are taken as models, to make a statement about having a powerful culture. They have used the name of Tàpies, of Gaudí, and a series of other figures to project this image of Catalonia.

EJ: *Les quatre cròniques* was originally for another room in the palace of the Generalitat but it was relocated, do you know why?

TT: I do not remember, I cannot tell you exactly. It was a commission that he made for the Generalitat, I cannot tell you if it was planned for another room, it is possible, it is in the room where the Catalan government meets, it always appears on the news.

EJ: There is a photograph of your father signing a contract for the mural; do you know any of the specific conditions of the commission or if they asked him to use that subject?

¹² Guibernau, "Nationalism and Intellectuals in Nations without States...", 25.

TT: No, no, the subject no. They asked if he would make a mural and he chose the topic of the four historic chroniclers of Catalonia. I suppose that it seemed correct to him that this particular subject was adequate for the situation, but they did not ask him to make the art specifically about this theme.

EJ: It was simply for a specific space...?

TT: Yes, he made something for the space.

EJ: In the foundation there is a white box full of photocopies of press articles about *Mitjó*, the whole process and quantity of political interventions seem absurd as it was, to begin with, the direction of MNAC's idea to commission the work. Do you remember how your father reacted when politicians, institutions, and the media were debating the project? How did he feel?

TT: Yes, I remember that. The worst he felt since the moment that MNAC asked him to make a project for the *Sala Oval*, and when he presented his small model (which still exists, the sock) was when someone from MNAC said that they had not asked Tàpies to make anything, that he made the model because he wanted to, and the project ended there. If he made something it was because they asked him to make something, not because he had the idea of doing something there, it is absurd. He felt bad about this because it seemed like someone said that he was presenting a project that nobody sought him out to do, and that is not true. Later I think he became a little entertained reading the number of stories that were printed in newspapers, the majority were ridiculous, that in a way show the cultural and artistic level of this country, when in other countries this sort of project would be something normal that nobody would remark about to such an extent, here it turned into a hot topic of the press, the television, they made jokes and published caricatures.

EJ: It is curious that you say this because *The New York Times* published something about *Mitjó*, and it projected Barcelona as more sophisticated than the United States precisely for having this sort of public debate about the project. However, I agree more with you, that it was at a level....

TT: ... yes it was a very low level, to me the polemic always seemed correct, but they ended up saying true barbarities. Public sculpture is always polemic because not everyone likes it, there are neighbors that live nearby and they could be bothered by new projects while others will never see the sculpture, sometimes they obstruct access; I remember Richard Serra's sculptures, for example, that became controversial simply because they created a barrier between neighbors, or they were even seen as dangerous. Public sculptures are always going to be polemic, but the debate that occurred here with *Mitjó* was with extremely low levels of artistic analysis.

EJ: As a poet and a gallery owner, how do you see the role of politicians in relation to contemporary art?

TT: The role of politicians concerning contemporary art is minor, fairly irregular and not always at a high level. Politicians in general tend to use art for their own agenda, artists should be careful not to fall into their hands. Sometimes particular artists can become of interest, for example when we talked about the PSUC, my father did have affinity for the party, and there was a synergy between them in order to obtain something better. Today, I think artists ought to maintain a distance from politics, because if they do not they end up losing their liberty, I do not mean to say that as individuals they cannot have political opinions, but I think that maintaining a concrete separation, because as I say, with some exceptions, generally politicians in this country do not understand very much about contemporary art.

EJ: Your father made a cover for the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia (2006). Do you know if he had been asked to do it or if it was simply something he wanted to do?

TT: Normally when he made this type of thing it was because someone asked him to. Yes, yes, this was a commission.

EJ: His artworks, as well as his writing, privilege ambiguity and they often give the individual the opportunity to think and reflect. At the same time, there are works that show his support to certain initiatives. It is clear that he was an anti-Francoist. Would you have considered him always as a Catalanist, and what did Catalanism mean for him?

TT: We spoke about this a bit, to defend Catalanism (for him) was to defend a model of understanding political life in a country where absolute power did not exist, instead there had been a parliament that could counteract the absolute power of a king. This was the case in Catalonia during the Middle Ages, Catalonia was one of the first countries to have a constitution, to defend this was to defend, at that time, something that did not yet exist in Spain, and in this sense my father was a Catalan nationalist.

EJ: Do you remember if he had an opinion about the reconstruction of *Les Quatre Columnes* in 2010?

TT: No, I do not think so. He was quite old, he probably only read about it in the media. I suppose that he would have thought that it was a positive act to recover the monument, but I do not remember that we had spoken much about this topic.

EJ: In 2013 Google created a doodle dedicated to Tàpies using an image of one of his artworks. Did you know the company was going to do so beforehand?

TT: No, no, it was a surprise.

EJ: Curious, is it legal to do that?

TT: Yes, yes it is curious... well I imagine that Google should have asked for rights to use the image, but I found out about the doodle the day that it appeared, they (employees of the foundation) called me telling me to look at Google, I looked and saw it, it was the chair. I did not know beforehand.

EJ: Did he express opinions about the separatist movement in Catalonia? Would your father have participated in 9N?

TT: Today? I am not sure. For my father what was important, in his time, was that Spain would return to a democratic country, with a parliament, that could be more or less equivalent to other European countries, and that would respect Catalonia's autonomy, as it was for some years, later there was an involution, from Madrid which intended to recover aspects that had already been ceded to Catalonia. Today, and all of this concerning 9N, which he did not live because it was after his death, I am truly not sure what he would think. I personally think that it is a shame not to have previously found a system that would allow for the different nations that form part of Spain to be united, focusing more on what unifies than on what separates us. This has not been possible and Madrid's government is primarily at fault, it has always tried to depreciate the Catalan language, including in many instances humiliating Catalan culture, and we are paying for this, it is a pity. I think that my father would have said that it is a shame, that we could not have better solved this issue from the outset so that we would not have to be in this situation, this is what I imagine he would think now.

EJ: The Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya used the artwork *Pintura romànica i barretina* (1971) as a cover for the exhibition publications for *Visita al romànic. En companyia d'Antoni Tàpies*. What do you think about this artwork and the exhibition?

TT: It is an amusing canvas; he took a Romanesque piece, with little value and made this intervention, sort of like a tribute to a certain era of Catalan history. For him, Romanesque Catalan art had always had a large impact and MNAC has some examples of tremendous importance here, possibly the most important in any museum in Barcelona.

EJ: And the exhibition *Tàpies: des de l'interior* a few months before?

TT: This was an exhibition with a lot of artworks, part of which was shown in the foundation and another at MNAC, later there was a slightly reduced version that was shown in Miami, at the Perez Museum. Personally, I think that there were probably too many artworks in this exhibition, but it was the criteria of the commission and evidently I respect their decisions.

EJ: Do you think it was because of the space (the rooms they had chosen) or did they simply want to show more examples of each moment? It started with his oldest artworks and followed chronologically...

TT: I do not think it was a problem of space. Personally, if I were to do an exhibition like this, I would have been more selective; I would have put up fewer pieces with a little more space for each one.

EJ: And the exhibition that the Guggenheim organized in 2013 (the same year), I am curious if Bilbao was chosen for any particular reason, because he had more experience in New York, as he had various exhibitions there, maybe it was to facilitate the transport of the artworks...

TT: This was all about the Guggenheim Bilbao, they asked to have an exhibition of objects and sculptures, and they did it there, they never offered us the option to do it in New York.

EJ: Finally, what do you believe was your father's greatest professional achievement?

TT: I think that in general you can say that the presence of my father's oeuvre in the art of the second half of the twentieth century is something that is indisputable. If someone wants to write the history of art of the second half of the twentieth century, they would have to talk about my father, and this is not easy. It is not easy for an artist to have the genius and creativity to be recognized amongst the great number of artists from around the globe. In addition, his perseverance and his desire to work and communicate, to send a message to the world of hope in reality, to try to help humanity to overcome adversity, fear, uncertainty, is something that he intended to do from the outset. No artist has been able to fix the problems of the world, but at least I think it is important to try to do so.

Appendix B: Resumen de la tesis en castellano

En 1981 Jordi Pujol, presidente de la Generalitat de Catalunya, expresó el orgullo que sentía del ámbito artístico de Cataluña.¹ Mencionó tanto a los artistas románicos, como a los modernos de la región, nombrando principalmente a figuras como Antoni Gaudí, Joan Miró, Antoni Tàpies, y Salvador Dalí. Pujol se enorgulleció de este grupo de hombres para demostrar que Cataluña es un lugar donde florece la creatividad e innovación. El presidente continuó presentando como la exhibición *Catalunya Avui*, celebrada en la sede de UNESCO en París, presentaba la cultura catalana al público internacional y como trataba de cultivar el conocimiento sobre España, por extensión. El menos conocido en aquel momento de esta lista era, sin duda, Tàpies. Aunque es un figura reconocida en el mundo del arte, su reputación internacional es marginal fuera de la comunidad artística. Sus cuadros sucios, difíciles y ambiguos no son fáciles de leer ni entender. No son joviales como los de Miró ni escandalosos como los de Dalí. Sin embargo, durante el siglo XX, Tàpies ha desarrollado un estilo propio que los catalanes continúan celebrando hoy en día.

¿Por qué ha llegado a ser icónico el arte de Tàpies en Cataluña? Tanto Pujol en 1981 como Artur Mas en 2012 han reconocido que su obra forma parte fundamental de la cultura catalana. Este investigación trata de las condiciones sociales que han permitido que Tàpies reemplazará el lugar de Joan Miró como referente principal de las artes plásticas en Catalunya. Es más, analizo las circunstancias políticas que han afectado el inicio de la carrera profesional del artista, especialmente el papel que la Generalitat de Catalunya y el Ajuntament de Barcelona ha jugado en el apoyo y promoción del arte de Tàpies.

Retrospectivas recientes, organizadas en el siglo XXI han provocado preguntas sobre la percepción de la obra de Tàpies. ¿Cómo afecta el contexto en la recepción de su arte? Es particularmente interesante pensar en como el público puede reflejar la estética de las imágenes de Tàpies como fuente de ciertas ideologías, sin tener en cuenta la historia de la vida del artista ni sus obras previas. Esta investigación analiza como las exhibiciones en el Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Instituto Cervantes y Dia:Beacon han presentado al artista y como instituciones culturales pueden afectar a la

¹ Pujol, Discurso en la sede la UNESCO en París, 115-117.

concepción de identidades catalanas contemporáneas. En un análisis de las obras presentadas, muestro matices sobre objetivos políticos institucionales y la práctica de crear exhibiciones.

Finalmente, considero como el arte con contenido político afecta a la concepción de ideas en relación a la nación. *From Art to Politics* de Murray Edelman ha demostrado que el arte tiene la capacidad de estimular pensamientos y sentimientos de una manera distinta a otras experiencias cotidianas.² Además, el arte puede crear nuevas realidades, proponiendo perspectivas alternativas que podrían dar lugar a posibilidades previamente no percibidas. A través de la presentación de las ideas visuales, el arte puede activar el pensamiento crítico, puede dinamizar la democracia y animar a un replanteamiento de los hábitos y las creencias convencionales.³ Edelman nos muestra que el arte es un aspecto fundamental de la experiencia humana y siempre tiene que ver con la política. *From Art to Politics* establece que la comunicación visual es una fuerza política importante, pero poco estudiada. ¿Cuál es la relación entre la obra de Tàpies y los nacionalismos en Cataluña? Mientras Tàpies creó muchos cuadros que demuestran su deseo de expresar visualmente composiciones asociadas con su tierra natal, no nos muestra que el ser catalán es mutuamente excluyente de ser español o europeo. Al mismo tiempo, su aceptación de determinados proyectos públicos y, lo más interesante, su negación de crear un mural para el aeropuerto de Madrid, revela a la actitud del artista hacia las obras de alto perfil fuera de Cataluña. A través de su arte y sus escrituras, lo que Tàpies dejaba claro era su deseo de vivir libremente bajo una democracia tanto en Cataluña como en España. Esta investigación considera tanto las representaciones del artista en relación con los nacionalismos, como la manera en que ciertos grupos pueden acceder a ellas en diversos espacios y tiempos.

El desarrollo de los nacionalismos catalanes y el movimiento separatista que se ha incrementado en popularidad en el siglo XXI complica el entorno político de las exhibiciones de Tàpies. Nuevas evaluaciones son necesarias frente a los grandes cambios en el ámbito nacional de España. Aunque el artista ha fallecido en Febrero del año 2012, su idioma visual se ha mantenido vivo en Barcelona durante los años siguientes. Esta investigación propone una perspectiva nueva que considera el arte de Tàpies como nunca antes, frente a realidades sociales y políticas en cambio. Además, se abre a un debate sobre el papel político del arte en la sociedad. Con Tàpies y Cataluña como ejemplo, propongo varias hipótesis. Primero, la obra del artista se

² Edelman, *From Art to Politics*, 143.

³ *Ibid.*, 144.

ha establecido como icónica para una población en un momento peculiar, irónicamente permitiendo el éxito del artista durante los años setenta a pesar de los grandes cambios sociopolíticos a los que Tàpies respondió visualmente con una constancia tremenda. El comienzo de la carrera de Tàpies, en los años cuarenta y cincuenta, coincidió con una época de represión política en España, una época en que la abstracción era reconocido internacionalmente como una manera culta de expresar ideas políticas. El momento era crítico en la formación temprana del artista porque le permitió crear arte poco concreto visualmente pero con contenido político. Era un arte aceptado por la comunidad internacional de artistas, galeristas, y críticos del arte y a la vez difícil para el régimen franquista censurarla por su estilo prácticamente abstracto.

Segundo, la Generalitat de Catalunya y el Ajuntament de Barcelona han dado apoyo al artista dentro de la región y han presentado al artista como un catalán ejemplar durante y después de su vida. Sin embargo, las instituciones gubernamentales han hecho esto a través de distintas maneras. Pujol y el programa nacionalista de CiU entre 1980 y 2003 han trabajado en armonía con los encargos públicos y el apoyo fiscal que daba la Generalitat a Tàpies y su fundación. El Ajuntament, por otro lado, era controlado por el PSC al finales del siglo XX y quería presentar a Tàpies como artista de vanguardia a la audiencia internacional. Sus obras y exhibiciones creadas por el gobierno metropolitano reflejaban menos una identidad catalana y más un impulso innovador y arriesgado. El apoyo institucional que ha recibido Tàpies es remarcable y evidente a través de sus obras publicas y exhibiciones póstumas organizadas en su honor. Investigar la conexión entre el artista y estos organismos gubernamentales es fundamental para visualizar un modelo de análisis cultural en Cataluña.

Tercero, exhibiciones recientes que han incluido obras de Tàpies puedan estar mal interpretadas, específicamente considerando la ideología del artista y el movimiento independentista en Cataluña del siglo XXI. Las exhibiciones creados por instituciones culturales como el Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya son siempre inseparables de la política y tiene un papel importante en la concepción y negociación de la identidad catalana desde el interior y al exterior. El aprendizaje en este museo no esta limitado a visitantes exclusivamente catalanes, también trata de presentar ideas sobre el arte y la sociedad al público extranjero y de otras partes de España.

La última hipótesis es que el arte es una manera poco percibida de comunicar ideas sobre la identidad, tanto histórica como contemporánea. La identidad nacional es un elemento

poderoso, aunque frecuentemente velada en la obra de Tàpies, que continua teniendo resonancia en la vida visual de Cataluña. Examinando las maneras en las que el arte puede desencadenar reacciones emocionales e intelectuales, ganamos una mayor conciencia de nuestras propias respuestas a los estímulos externos. Por otro lado, el análisis de la forma en que se presentan estos objetos expone las estructuras de poder político, que a menudo afectan a la forma en la que vivimos la experiencia de ver obras de arte.

“The Visualization of a Nation: Tàpies and Catalonia” es un estudio multidisciplinar que combina la historia social, teorías del nacionalismo, ciencia política y teorías sociales. Sus fuentes primarias consisten en obras de arte, textos escrito por el artista, publicaciones de exhibiciones y registros públicos. Las fuentes secundarias son libros y artículos de la historia del arte, la historia de Cataluña, teorías sociales e históricas y entrevistas con el hijo del artista, Toni Tàpies, el director de MNAC, Pepe Serra y el político Joan Guitart. La combinación de fuentes de distintas disciplinas académicas permite una perspectiva comprehensiva que trata de analizar la huella de la obra de Tàpies.

Los capítulos 2 y 3 consideran el estilo de Tàpies durante y después de la transición a la democracia en España enfocandose en el periodo 1975-1989. Tratan de la relación entre contenido político y el lenguaje artístico que Tàpies ha desarrollado bajo el régimen franquista en los años 50; a su vez explican como y por qué ha empezado a utilizar este estilo tan peculiar y por qué tenía el impulso de mantenerlo durante décadas. Utilizando el marco teórico de James C. Scott, en *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, se hace evidente porque Tàpies ha creado miles de composiciones parecidas estéticamente a pesar de los grandes cambios de su entorno. La teoría de Scott refiere a las relaciones de poder y los hechos ocultos en contra del poder dominante. Mientras que sus ejemplos se refieren a tácticas como lenguaje codificado, cuentos y rumores, el arte es un tipo de lenguaje visual que puede contribuir a la cultura de cada posición dentro de un conflicto social. El arte plástico comunica ideas que pueden alterar las opiniones, percepciones y perspectivas de cambio. La obra de Tàpies, bajo el marco de Scott, puede ser entendida como una fuerte denuncia en contra del régimen franquista. Lo que no trata en *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* es lo que sucede después de una protesta pública dramática o cambio en la estructura de poder. ¿Cómo ha evolucionado el lenguaje artístico de Tàpies después de la muerte del dictador que gobernó durante décadas? El estilo es un elemento clave en la obra de cualquier artista y el estilo de Tàpies, remarcablemente, no ha cambiado de

una forma radical durante mas de medio siglo. Estos capítulos se centran principalmente en las características formales de la obra de Tàpies, su relación con sus creencias personales relativas a la sociedad y su fama como artista contemporáneo en Cataluña. En 1983 el Ajuntament de Barcelona realizó un encargo al artista para crear un monumento en tres dimensiones en honor a la vida de Pablo Picasso. Obras de arte públicas ayudaron a establecer el reconocimiento profesional de Tàpies en España. En la primera parte también se analiza la importancia de la creación de la Fundació Antoni Tàpies en el contexto de la historia del arte, así como la composición de la cosmopolita ciudad de Barcelona. El examen de estilo, el tiempo y los estímulos sociales en este capítulo establece una base para un análisis más específicamente político en el próximo.

Los capítulos 4 y 5 tratan del periodo de 1990-2006, marcado por dos obras políticamente comprometidas de Tàpies. La primera es un enorme mural *Les quatre cròniques* (1990) que visualiza cuatro manuscritos catalanes escritos entre los siglos XIV y XIII. Este trabajo se encuentra en el Palau de la Generalitat, la sede del gobierno catalán y suele aparecer en los medios de comunicación detrás de los políticos reunidos en una gran mesa redonda. En esta sección se explora la promoción del artista por parte del gobierno. La segunda es la cubierta del Estatut d'autonomia de catalunya de 2006, que incluye un análisis de su diseño en el capítulo 5. Utilizando el marco teórico de Homi Bhabha sobre las naciones y el nacionalismo, investigo la relación entre la obra de Tàpies y la sociedad catalana, la historia de la región y las ideas del artista de cara al futuro. Tàpies, como un miembro de la comunidad catalana, utilizaba el arte para comunicar su identidad política y sus deseos sociales de una manera estratégica. Mientras que Bhabha usaba a la literatura para demostrar cómo la idea de la nación se concibe y se perpetúa en términos literarios, sus ideas son aplicables en las artes plásticas. Tàpies, como Miró antes que él, jugaba con una multiplicidad de tiempos, tiempos que contribuyeron a la idea de que la nación es un elemento físico, no ideológico, que se puede identificar con una gran historia en el pasado, mientras se imagina su futuro como un bloque unificado. Para Bhabha, estos tiempos dobles se han expresado en la literatura. Él se refiere a lo “pedagogical” y lo “performative,” elementos estratégicos que permiten la capacidad de los mitos nacionales a florecer en la imaginación contemporánea. *Les quatre cròniques* y la portada del Estatut son esencialmente una fusión de estos elementos. En estos capítulos se muestra como historias, tanto reales como imaginadas, relativas al pasado y el futuro han impactado en el artista y su obra. Es

más, uno las ideas de Edelman sobre la producción de la significación y las de Tim Edensor sobre los diversos espacios nacionales para examinar críticamente las obras públicas que creó Tàpies durante los años 90 y en los primeros años del siglo XXI.

Los capítulos 6 y 7 analizan varias exhibiciones organizadas entre 2007 y 2015 dentro y fuera de Cataluña. Durante la última década, el ambiente político en Cataluña se ha desplazado en gran medida a algo bastante inimaginable en los años al finales del siglo XX. Muchos catalanistas han demostrado su deseo de separarse del estado español y se ha presionado a figuras públicas a anunciar sus posiciones con respecto al tema. El examen crítico de la organización de exhibiciones del Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, en comparación con otros museos importantes, es esencial a fin de demostrar como el contexto afecta a la recepción del arte en la sociedad. El asalto incesante de los medios de comunicación y la publicidad que esta dominando la cultura contemporánea europea y norteamericana tiene un gran impacto en cómo conceptualizamos obras de arte. En cuanto vemos las palabras “Visca Catalunya” rayadas en un enorme panel de madera en Bilbao en 2014, puede implicar un significado que es totalmente distinto de lo que el mismo panel habría significado en Barcelona durante los años 70. El tiempo y el espacio son igualmente importantes en estos capítulos y demuestro cómo el arte pueda afectar las ideas. El arte puede perpetuar, transformar, o incluso cambiar ideas a través de su exhibición. Los últimos capítulos hablan sobre las relaciones entre el arte y la política respecto a la presentación del arte de Tàpies en museos y galerías. Tanto la identidad y el sentimiento de pertenencia nacional son cuestiones relevantes en el análisis de las muestras de arte público. El contexto original de cualquier obra es imposible recrearlo en una sala con paredes blancas, por lo tanto, los comisarios trabajan para dar sentido a numerosos objetos que ya están descontextualizados desde el principio. Para el espectador, el tiempo se comprime, mientras que se mueven libremente entre obras que, en el caso de retrospectivas, abarcan varias décadas. Experimentar el arte de esta manera, junto con textos en relación con el tema y los grupos de objetos seleccionados como representativos de una tema más allá, transmite ideas sobre el valor del arte, la identidad artística, el orgullo nacional y el gusto personal. Ferran Archilés expresó la importancia de una perspectiva histórica que se centra en el ámbito cultural como un componente clave en la comprensión de la experiencia nacional. La cultura es lo que determina la forma en que concebimos el mundo que nos rodea; la cultura estructura nuestra capacidad de organizar, categorizar y comprender. La cultura también establece lo que consideramos normal, nuevo, o

útil.⁴ En el entorno de un museo los espectadores son capaces de criticar abiertamente obras de arte, pero ¿se consideran con frecuencia cómo la cultura afecta a su experiencia o cómo la organización que creó la exhibición juega un papel en la estructura del conocimiento? El arte puede contribuir a lo que Sebastian Balfour y Alejandro Quiroga han definidos como “nuevas capas de identidad” que se transforman y sustituyen a las concepciones individuales y sociales anteriores.⁵ Estos capítulos se centran en la definición por Stuart Hall de la ideología como una escama mental, construida por idiomas, categorías, imágenes, y sistemas de representación, compartido por grupos distintos con el fin de darle sentido, definir, averiguar y hacer inteligible como funciona la sociedad,⁶ y expone como el arte y las instituciones culturales se relacionan con las tensiones que existe entre ideas sobre: lo individual y la comunidad, lo privado y lo público, lo tradicional y lo novedoso, y lo nacional y lo global.

La conclusión vuelve a las preguntas iniciales e hipótesis. Proporciona conclusiones específicas y generales. Las conclusiones específicas tiene que ver con la obra de Tàpies, su éxito en los años 70, el apoyo por parte del gobierno local y regional, y su legado como artista internacional. Las conclusiones explican la relación bilateral entre el arte y la política. Un cuadro nunca esta creado del vacío, siempre tiene contenido indirectamente político y cuando se expone públicamente ya esta directamente conectado a lo político. Finalmente, el arte tiene la capacidad de comunicar, formar o deshacer ideas preestablecidas que, por extensión, afectan a acciones futuras. El arte tiene poco que ver con el hecho de votar pero tiene mucho que ver con la cultura que nos hace pensar que nuestra entorno sea ‘normal.’ El arte muchas veces no es directamente político, pero el arte más interesante nos hace pensar más profundamente sobre temas difíciles. La obra de Tàpies nos hace pensar y, como decía Robert Lubar, “*Tàpies deserves far more.*”⁷ Esta investigación sirve como el único modelo que trata profundamente la obra de Tàpies paralelamente con lo político en Cataluña. Es un ejemplo académico que no cuadra dentro de una disciplina o otra, sino que cruza la historia con el arte, las teorías sociales con las políticas, ofreciendo una nueva perspectiva de las implicaciones de la obra de Tàpies. Finalmente, propone un marco para futuros estudios que tienen que ver con la interconexión entre las artes visuales y las ideologías nacionales y de identidades.

⁴ Archilés, “Lenguajes de nación...,” 100.

⁵ Balfour y Quiroga, *The Reinvention of Spain*, 204.

⁶ Hall, “The Question of Cultural Identity,” 26

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List of Abbreviations

CDC- Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya
CiU- Convergència i Unió
CUP- Candidatura d'Unitat Popular
ERC- Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya
ICV- Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds
MACBA- Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona
MNAC- Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya
PCC- Partit Comunista de Catalunya
PCE- Partido Comunista de España
PP- Partido Popular
PSC- Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya
PSOE- Partido Socialista Obrero Español
PSUC- Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya
Reina Sofía- Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía
UDC- Unió Democràtica de Catalunya





Archives

Arxiu Fotogràfic de Barcelona, Ajuntament de Barcelona

Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona, Ajuntament de Barcelona

Arxiu i Biblioteca, Fundació Antoni Tàpies

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