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**BRINGING THE VISUAL INTO FOCUS: STREET ART
AND CONTENTIOUS POLITICS IN BRAZIL, BOLIVIA
AND ARGENTINA**

by

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**A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract

Politically committed street art has been mobilised time and again as a crucial strategy and means of expression. Yet, social movement scholars and political analysts have displayed a persistent tendency to overlook the specificities of visual tools and aesthetic experience in contentious politics. Consequently, political action is often described and understood in ways that are reductive and distorted. This dissertation brings together a range of insights from art and aesthetics, communications and cultural studies in order to address this problem. Fundamentally, this study makes a novel contribution to the discipline of International Relations and to the associated field of Social Movement Theory by synthesising and extending scholarly work on political process and affective encounter in ways that facilitate a thoroughgoing analysis of politically committed street art and ‘what it can do’ in protest. Drawing on research undertaken in Bolivia, Brazil and Argentina, this dissertation argues that street art can and has been utilised strategically and instrumentally in protest, in mobilising resources and galvanising public opinion. It also contends that the framing processes leading to these outcomes have been under-specified due to their recourse to an epistemology that rationalises away the sensate dimensions of protest. A key claim of this thesis is that under certain circumstances street art can very usefully be modelled as a mode of infrapolitics; deliberately veiled expressions that seek to skirt the gaze of the authorities. However, it is also suggested that periods of seemingly rational and strategic deployments of street art are sometimes punctuated by something else, a collective sense of something gone awry, wherein the categories and tools for processing what went wrong are unavailable. In these instances, activists might be moved to produce street art or be moved by producing it. By attending to political street art’s instrumental and heuristic potentials, this piece of work goes beyond current discussions about framing and political opportunity. It also contributes a series of new case studies centred on periods of contention in Latin America.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Objectives of this text

Latin America is a region of the world that in the last century has seen dramatic social and political change. Swings back and forth between civilian and military rule, outside interventions based on Cold War rivalries and ongoing struggles to come to terms with the social and economic fallout from the colonial epoch all merge to make the continent a fertile ground for scholarly investigations into questions of power and ‘politics by other means’.¹ A great deal of the recent empirical work that has been undertaken by political scientists has been pre-occupied with the changed relationship between states and their subjects in the wake of “neoliberal globalisation” and the region’s democratic reforms (See Petras and Veltmeyer 2005; Johnston and Almeida 2006; Robinson 2008 for example). Whilst these works provide excellent insights into the new modes of organisation that have emerged in the past twenty years, they do not venture far into the domain of aesthetico-political engagements. By contrast, this dissertation examines the power and possibilities of political street art as a ‘contentious performance’ by charting and analysing the experiences of artist-activist collectives from three Latin American states. It focuses on activity during periods of authoritarian rule, democratic transition and representational crisis in Argentina, Brazil and Bolivia in order to reveal the ways in which the form and perceived utility of street art vary with and feed into the structures of political opportunity at hand; the ways in which

¹ The original use of this phrase by Clauswitz was in reference to the act of war. An updated definition appeared in 1990, Ginsberg and Shefter who used it to describe institutional politics. As used here, the meaning is closer to that intended by musician Harry Belafonte, who invoked the phrase in reference to cultural forms, activism and entertainment (See Anderson 2012).

activists might be moved to produce street art or be moved by producing, as well as the ways that affect-capture becomes a factor in the possibilities for mobilisation.

Fearful of straying too far from traditional rational actor models and an assiduous positivism, social movement scholars, particularly those emerging from the American tradition (see for example Tilly 1978, 1995, 2006; Tarrow 1994; McAdam 1982; McAdam et al 1996) have displayed a persistent tendency to overlook the specificities of visual tools and aesthetic experience in claim-making and resistance. Often, as a direct consequence, the potentials for mobilisation and the environmental matrices in which action takes place have been described and understood in ways that are oversimplified or even distorted. The overarching purpose of this dissertation then is to suggest a way to correct this oversight through appeal to other schools and avenues of thought. Whilst this project is broadly situated in the body of work on contentious politics, it necessarily bridges many other literatures, including that on art and aesthetics, communications and Latin American studies. Importantly, it seeks to make a relevant intervention in the broader field of International Relations theory by demonstrating the relevance of both creative endeavour and popular mobilisation to questions over the nature, sources and transmission of political power and the possibilities for social change. Additionally, it makes a case for a wider acceptance of non-conventional knowledge practices and critical epistemologies within the discipline; approaches that can provide novel insights as to challenges of ideological uptake and the limits of objectivity.

The research project introduced here uses work pioneered by the sociologist and historian Charles Tilly, as a springboard for its conceptual framework. Throughout the dissertation, ‘political street art’ acts as loose category for aesthetic interventions whose creative and material use of the street is necessary to the political meaning that the producer(s) wishes to convey. Considering political street art as a communicative, interactive and adaptable

‘contentious performance’, as Tilly might, paves the way for greater investigation into the extents of its instrumentality and operations of power in different settings. Whilst the political process tradition of social movement theory has granted limited attention to visual strategies and the aesthetic dimensions of protest, it is possible to extrapolate insights from a handful of works that deal with music, art and poetry under the rubric incorporating culture into the fold. These works, pioneered in the 1990’s by Eyermann and Jamison (1998), Jasper (1997) and Johnston and Klandermanns (1995) provide a rough indication as to the ways in which street art may be utilised instrumentally; to attract resources, frame objectives and opponents, mobilise support, disseminate information and evoke responses. They also extend to examine the role of movement initiatives in processes of cultural transformation. This body of work has been invaluable to progress in understanding the ways and means by which movements come into being and the factors that facilitate their growth and resonance. However, where much of the existing political process literature still falls short, is in its overly positivistic rendering of political opportunity structures and its under-specification of the role of affect.

In response, this dissertation explores where and how theorists might incorporate lessons from critical theory and the ‘affective turn’ which has already taken place in cultural studies, in order to develop a broader and more encompassing understanding of the environmental matrices within which artist-activists (and indeed, all activists) operate and the ways in which aesthetic modes (in this case politically committed street art) interact with the faculties, perceptions and bodily impulses of producers and observers to reveal new modes of belonging and alter the possibilities for action. As such, this project also builds upon a small number of other scholarly works (See for example Feigenbaum 2010; Halsey and Young 2006) that seek to illustrate street art’s potential as a receptacle of power and immanence. Going much further than these short case studies, this piece of work explores street art’s various communicative, expressive and heuristic functions in a variety of social and political

contexts. In so doing it draws together the objective and subjective dimensions of street art in contentious action, a task that has so far eluded political process scholars.

1.2 Guiding questions

As Charles Tripp has observed in a recent lecture on the ‘Arab Spring’, street art has been mobilised time and again as part of an offensive or defensive political posture by a broad range of actors (Tripp 2012). Producers of political street art, henceforth referred to as ‘artist activists’, cut across the political spectrum from left to right and may include those from dominant and marginal parties and alliances. Lyman Chaffee (1993:24), who provides what can easily be considered the seminal examination of politically committed street art, expounds the important point that “[i]f groups in democratic and authoritarian systems utilise political art, they must believe it serves a useful function and produces an impact”. In attempting to synthesise and build upon the themes, strengths and weaknesses of existing theoretical and empirical work on social movement strategy as well as those addressing politically committed street art, this dissertation embarks upon a journey to provide a novel cross country study, guided by a set of general questions around the issues of functionality, utility and contextuality. Broadly, it asks:

1. What social and political conditions might encourage a turn to street art as a mode or strategy in contentious politics?
2. What can the presence, style and concentration of politically committed street art tell observers about the socio-political context?
3. In what ways can street art interventions feed back into the social milieu, altering or sustaining the possibilities for resistance?

1.3 Case selection (I) countries

In order to garner useful insights around these questions it is necessary to direct focus towards a region of the world that has experienced political upheaval and it is helpful to investigate one that has undergone transition from authoritarian to formal democratic rule. Of the many ‘worthy’ contenders, Latin America emerges as a clear choice for this project. Over the last half-century, Latin America has undergone significant political change. From the mid twentieth century, the Cold War context and the opposing ideological aspirations of the USA and Soviet Union strongly influenced the direction of events in the region. The rise of a new generation of left-wing revolutionary leaders backed by the Soviet Union from the 1950’s led to increased polarisation in the region as the United States rallied behind right wing and conservative social forces to curb the perceived communist threat. In the mid 1960’s there followed a spate of military coups across the region. These regimes were usually ideologically aligned with, as well as financially and militarily backed by the United States. Material support was disseminated by the United States in line with its desire to ensure social control and political influence in its ‘own backyard’.

The Latin American military regimes placed priority on the preservation of public order as a means to realise their goals of economic progress and they often employed systematic violence against left-wing politicians and sympathisers as a measure to eradicate ‘destabilising’ communist influences. Yet, by the mid to late 1970’s it had become apparent that many the regimes had fallen short of their stated objectives, having overwhelmingly failed to find solutions to the economic and social crises plaguing their peoples. Towards the end of the 1980’s, with the winding down of the Cold War, the United States also shifted its support away from the military regimes, adopting the line that the repressive modes of authoritarian rule were thwarting the consolidation of legitimate government in the region. A

so-called third wave of democratisation (Huntington 1991) swept across the region in the 1970's, bringing a model of formal electoral democracy to all states but Cuba. Whilst Latin America's return to civilian rule brought about great hope for the revitalisation of civil society and political institutions, a raft of 'bait and switch' manoeuvres by newly elected presidents in the late 1980's and early 1990's led to rising levels of economic inequality and social immobility. Market liberalisations prescribed by Washington technocrats fuelled discontent in many countries. As a consequence, the 1990's and 2000's saw a resurgence of political activism, with new and old players emerging to challenge what they viewed as a marketised and hollow democracy.

This dissertation examines and triangulates a broad range of first and second hand sources from three Latin American states, indeed three Latin American cities, whose experiences of authoritarianism and democratic transition roughly coincide in chronological terms but whose demographic and politico-economic realities differ markedly. Argentina constitutes a part of the 'Southern Cone',² described as the most prosperous macro-region in Latin America (Steven 2001). During the industrialising and export economy period beginning in the 1850's, labour shortages in the Southern Cone were filled by European agriculturalists and entrepreneurs who brought their pre-formed expectations *vis-à-vis* government and lobbied for investment in education and welfare legislation to benefit workers. Patterns of settlement lobbying and investment led to the evolution of an educated society with relatively equal income distribution (Thorp and Berges 2007). Some scholars would include Latin America's only (and the world's largest) Lusophone state as a part of the Southern Cone, although only southern Brazil falls south of the Tropic of Capricorn. Along with Colombia, Venezuela, Suriname, the Guianas and the Caribbean, Brazil has been categorised by Thorp and Berges

² There is widespread disagreement as to which countries constitute the Southern Cone. The term technically designates the geographical area lying to the South of the Tropic of Capricorn, yet this would include portions of Bolivia, Paraguay Chile and Brazil which are not included in many political definitions.

(2007) as a ‘post-slave’ economy, highlighting the persistence of socio-racial inequalities tied to the legacy of slavery in the region. In Brazil, slavery began in the 16th century, with the arrival of the Portuguese. At first, indigenous peoples were enslaved to cultivate the land but the unintended transfer of European diseases wiped out huge numbers of Indians leading later to the large-scale importation of enslaved Africans, which heavily shaped the contemporary multi-ethnic landscape.³ Bolivia, described by Thorp and Berges (2007) as one of several ‘*macha-india*’ countries in the Andean region of South America, retains its majority of *originarios* or indigenous peoples, historically enslaved and marginalised from the political process for many centuries.

The differences between these states and the diversity of communities and individuals therein cannot be overstated and should not be flattened out. The distinctions employed by Thorp and Berges serve as an indicative register only and by no means do they capture the full and complex reality on the ground. However, revisiting the arguments of anthropologist, James C Scott (1992) one key enquiry of this work is around the assertion that broadly similar political experiences, when they arise, may well lead to certain similarities in the modes and expressions of insubordination that are operationalised. Taking as case studies, key episodes of contention in the urban zones of São Paulo, La Paz and Buenos Aires, this dissertation invokes and assesses Scott’s premise, alongside the research questions outlined above. Case studies tend to focus on just one or a few instances of a particular phenomenon and can be mobilised to great success in providing an in-depth account of events, relationships, experiences or processes that occur in a given locale or timeframe. Whilst case studies may

³ Additionally, after slavery was abolished in 1888 (Brazil was the last state in the Western Hemisphere to institute abolition), Sino-Japanese immigration was promoted until the 1920’s. There were attempts made to facilitate the persistence of cheap labour, for instance the Land Law of Brazil (1850) which prohibited land occupations, entrenched the power of large landholders and forced landless former slaves to either work as labourers or servants on large plantations or remain in or join *quilombos* (Rapoport Centre for Human Rights and Justice 2008).

legitimately be undertaken in the form of single or multiple-case designs, when there is no basis for comparison it can be hard to judge whether the observations made in a single study are specific to that scenario or in fact reflect broader trends in human behaviour. With single case studies there is, therefore, a significant risk of false uniqueness and for this reason, the analysis presented here works with a wider ‘sample’, addressing episodes of contention that cross countries and timeframes.

1.4 Case selection (II) actors

In attending to the three questions outlined above, this project brings together material from unstructured interviews conducted with artist-activists during fieldwork undertaken in Buenos Aires, La Paz and São Paulo between 2011 and 2012, images of street art interventions as well as historical interviews and political texts. Importantly, this piece of research seeks to attend to the feedback between the agentic initiatives embodied in political street art production and the broader political context, whilst also elevating the role and importance of building affect into any study of contentious politics. As such, this project moves towards a revised and updated version of Tilly’s ‘process-oriented’ approach. It proceeds with Raymond Williams’ recognition that the course of history is always already unfolding; that scholarly readings are always contingent and partial. For this reason, the text attempts where possible to grant the utmost space to the voices of those who have been present and active during the moments in question, the artist-activists themselves. It is only really they who can in their descriptions bring us closer to an engagement with the “sticky entanglements of substances and feelings, of matter and affect” (Highmore 2010:139) that facilitate, drive and complicate political action; that are central to the ways in which street art production works over bodies.

The primary rationale for engaging with the collectives whose stories and experiences are explored herein has been their activities and positioning in time and space. More specifically, I sought to engage with and capture the experiences of politicised collectives who have produced street art as reactive or strategic interventions in the aforementioned cities during authoritarian rule, as well as those active during formal democratic transition and in its aftermath.

Though neither has guided decisions to include them in my study, it must be said that luck and chance played their part in initially locating some of the groups studied here. In most cases, the artist-activists whose voices are reproduced in these pages were located through a process of time-consuming investigative endeavour, trial and error and snowball sampling. With some candour one might describe the process as ‘following one’s nose’. Varying degrees of adherence to a ‘politics of memory’ around authoritarian rule affected my search for relevant actors to a considerable degree. In Argentina today, remembering the atrocities of the dictatorship period and punishing the perpetrators can be described in terms of dominant societal motifs, even conditions of entry to some cultural and political fora. Meanwhile, Bolivia and Brazil can be described as latecomers in terms of transitional justice initiatives, displaying more of an “unmastered history” in Schneider’s words (Schneider 2010). Resultantly, it was somewhat easier to identify relevant actors in Argentina, if not necessarily much easier to access them.

In some cases the subjects and their activities were well known to me before embarked on my fieldwork trip in August 2011. The *Madres of the Plaza de Mayo* are now well known across the world, whilst the activities of the *Grupo del Arte Callejero* and *Taller Popular de Serigrafía* had been brought to my attention through the translated works of Dr Ana Longoni from the University of Buenos Aires (UBA). By contrast, a chance encounter with a 1980’s

documentary about social cohesion and community spaces in Brazil put me on the trail of the Brazilian artist-activists *Grupo Tupinãodá*. In other cases, I happened upon artist-activists as I made my way across the South American continent. Discussions about Bolivian art history with Edgar Arandia, Director of *the Museo Nacional del Arte* in La Paz led to the revelation that he and some of his collaborators had been at the forefront of cultural resistance to Hugo Banzer's dictatorship. Meanwhile, I stumbled across the *Insurgencia Comunitaria* activists at work as I traversed La Paz with my camera.

1.5 Using images as source material

The images reproduced in this text serve as portal to the times, places and interventions discussed herein. Unlike the conventional exhibition, in which a collection of art objects are categorised by a curator and strategically placed next to each other to be viewed in succession, the function of street art is more akin to that of installation. In the case of murals, graffiti and fly-posting, the space occupied by the art object is chosen and/or designed according to the creative will of the artist, in a sense turning the artist into curator and arguably preserving a more direct communicative channel between the producer and the viewer. For this reason amongst others, there is a valid claim to be made for promoting street art as useful source of social history.

Importantly however, a point and caveat addressed more closely in the chapter that follows is that one cannot very reliably imitate the visual with the verbal, presenting a particular challenge in the cases of interventions that emerge unaccompanied by words and slogans. There is an ever-present problem of intentionality; the idea that there is always a mismatch between what the producer intends and what the audience receives. The incorporation of affect presents one way for us to move past this impasse, the suggestion being that sense experience as affective intensity maintains and requires a certain autonomy and

‘untouchableness’. However it can be convincingly argued that a small degree of interpretive distortion can be reduced by displaying, rather than just describing the art interventions themselves.

Many of the images contained within these pages are my own or have been included with the express permission of the photographers. Several of the images reproduced herein are the product of considerable time spent interrogating the Latin American art history annals at the University of Essex, as well as the online poster collections of the *Organización de Solidaridad con los Pueblos de Asia, África y América Latina* (Organisation in Solidarity with the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America or OPSAAL) and output from some of the more ‘radical’ publishing houses. Additionally, a small number of images have been borrowed with attribution rights from Flickr registrants. Street art, as a largely ephemeral medium has the potential to evade the processes of temporal anchoring that occur in the museum setting, making it an interesting and useful source for social history. Yet, one of the greatest challenges in dealing with an ephemeral medium like street art is that it can be incredibly hard to document. It is generally produced or disseminated swiftly and it is often covered over or ‘thrown away’ just as quickly. Interventions from the past have quite often faded away unrecorded and even present-day interventions may disappear in moments at the sweep of a paintbrush, demanding interested parties to be ever ready with a camera and mapping device. As such, the opportunities for street art documentation and information sharing now afforded by social media and new web-based platforms arguably make them priceless tools for social research. Among other things, these ‘new media’ enable us to be and to see many places otherwise out of reach and they allow us to see them all at once.

1.6 The organisation of this text

This dissertation is organised in into five separate chapters, which are punctuated by images

of the street art interventions referred to in the text. Chapter One has provided a brief introduction and overview of the project, its guiding questions and methodological premises. It has also provided an indication of where and how the project is situated in relevant literatures. However, given the inter-disciplinary scope of the project and its appeal to rather distant branches of knowledge, the task of formally reviewing relevant bodies of theory, identifying the gaps and issues to be addressed through this piece of work are undertaken in greater space and depth in Chapter Two. Additionally, Chapter Two elaborates on the meaning and use of the category ‘political street art’ as invoked in this piece of work and it sets out in detail the conceptual framework that is carried forward through the rest of the text.

Chapters Three, Four and Five constitute the case studies that ultimately provide the experiential substance for this project. Each of the country-studies proceeds with an account of the historical uses, appropriations and stylistic evolution of political street art before drawing on interview material to explore the actions and encounters of artist-activist groups. This background material is necessary to set the scene in each case, to adequately contextualise the development of political street art as a tool and a mode of expression that has a distinct political, cultural and historical lineage.

As indicated above, Chapter Three begins with an overview of the historical uses and appropriations of political street art in Brazil before moving on to examine the motivations, actions and evolving articulations of São Paulo’s first documented street art collective, *Grupo Tupinãodá*. The shortest of the country-studies, this chapter focuses on just one artist-activist collective, seeking to unpack the deliberate-strategic and the unprecedented affective encounters that have driven the group’s interventions during the move from authoritarian to formally democratic government.

Chapter Four again begins by charting the development and evolving uses of political street

art before narrowing its focus to explore the experiences of three artist-activist collectives: the *Círculo 70*, *Mujeres Creando* and *Insurgencia Comunitaria*. In the case of Bolivia, it is argued that the history of representation and appropriation in street art is inseparable from the long and arduous struggle for substantive social equality for the country's indigenous population.

Chapter Five investigates questions of utility, functionality and contextuality in the case of Argentina, which has been described in terms of its “hyperarticulation” by Lyman Chaffee (1993). It also highlights the contingencies and affective encounters surrounding three large-scale outpourings of street art or street-art events which have occurred in Buenos Aires: the *Tucumán Arde* intervention of 1968; the ‘*siluetazo*’ of 1983 and the outpouring of stencil articulations that accompanied the 2001 financial crisis.

Finally, Chapter Six of this dissertation provides a summary of the conceptual and empirical advances made through this project, as well as the ways in which it makes a broader methodological and ethical intervention that challenges the established parameters of the discipline of International Relations (IR). Importantly, it draws together the insights and arguments made in the main body of the dissertation and it restates them succinctly, showing exactly why and how this project makes a novel contribution to the current literature.

CHAPTER 2

Situating the project: a literature review and elaboration of my conceptual framework

So it is that films, comic books and posters have crept in by the back door, like so many stray cats; science fiction and the sublime have been treated to the academic equivalent of the blind tasting, with some swallowing and some spitting out; literary allusion is tolerated, for the most part, as a kind of froth or expectation, as if over-egging the pudding or over-doing the drink. Art, or rather the consideration of art, has infiltrated the pages of the more progressive journals, most often in 'special issues' ...In the profession as whole, however, it remains almost invisible. (Danchev and Lisle 2009:776)

2.1 Reflections on stray cats: popular mobilisation and art in International Relations

The history of the discipline of International Relations is often rather reductively conveyed in terms of a series of great debates, the most recent of which roughly coincided with the end of the Cold War and continues to rage on today. The failure of the dominant positivist research paradigms not only to predict the dissolution of the Soviet Union but also to recognise the very possibility that such a change might take place, had dramatic consequences for the structure and scope of the discipline. With the explanatory pretensions of realists, liberals and Marxists severely undermined, the winding-down of the Cold War initiated a process in which “spaces and people outside the frame of the East-West conflict climbed the fences of IR and claimed ground for their concerns” (Sylvester 2009:5).

The epistemological and thematic *coup d'état* began with the import of unit-level and holistic constructivist theories, as scholars such as Lebow and Risse-Kappen (1996); Koslowski and Kratochwil (1996) found newly receptive audiences for their arguments about the importance

of evolving norms, ideas, and perceptions as constitutive and causal factors in the East-West reconciliation. As disciplinary preoccupations with bipolarity and impending nuclear disaster waned, new global issues, including climate change and human rights came to the fore as key discussion points. Reus-Smit (1996) also explains that by the beginning of the 1990s a new generation of scholars had emerged, many of whom were united in their wholesale rejection of methodological individualism, materialism and refutation of the distinctions between subject and object, fact and value.

IR has undeniably been enriched by these philosophical and empirical reorientations. Emergent critical voices have aspired to re-examine issues of causality, agency and the relationship between power and knowledge in international politics, such that dominant disciplinary narratives have been deconstructed to reveal, fundamentally, that all theory is for some one and for some purpose (Cox 1989). Yet, the expansion of the discipline over the 1990s and 2000s has brought with it certain difficulties in establishing a productive dialogue. Christine Sylvester (2009:6) explains that the field of IR scholarship has been broadening into distinct camps, each of which “...carves out specific areas of interest, uses a particular vocabulary to express that interest, upholds a different set of revered personages and holds to canonical texts that camp followers read, re-read and cite incessantly and other camps might never even know of, let alone read or cite”.

Notably, this broadening and fragmenting of the field has fostered a growing concern over IR's cohesion and self-image. Increasingly, national and international intra-disciplinary conferences, discussion groups and many of the more renowned journals are guided by questions over what, if indeed anything, unifies today's IR scholars. *Millennium's* recent annual conferences have, for example, been guided by the call for an ‘*IR in Dialogue*’ (2010) and for academics to get ‘*out of the ivory tower[!]*’ (2011). On the one hand, the discipline's

accelerated sense of existential crisis has engendered some positive changes, calling for greater mediation and efforts to bridge the vast meta-theoretical chasms that today prohibit many IR scholars from engaging in meaningful discourse. However, in so doing, it has also paved the way for some more orthodox faculties to redraw their own exacting boundaries around the discipline. It has resulted too, in considerable attention being drawn away from real world events, their causes and consequences. Whilst a wave of popular uprisings were occurring across the Middle East and images of atrocities perpetrated by Syria's Assad regime began to filter through, the British International Studies Association – International Studies Association (BISA-ISA) 2012 conference organisers invited papers around the theme of *'Diversity in the Discipline: Tension or Opportunity in Responding to the Global'*. Even more strikingly however, in 2012, the 9th Convention of the Central and East European International Studies Association (CEEISA) addressed the *'Boundaries in/of international relations'* and asked, "whether studies of popular culture, social movements, interpersonal computer-mediated networks, and similar subjects have any place in IR?" Are questions about art worlds, mass culture and popular mobilisation superfluous to the demands of international political theory; is it frivolous, even irresponsible, to engage with such questions? There is a particular politics of exclusion at play in the discipline of International Relations, which this thesis seeks to highlight and challenge directly.

2.2 Social movements and International Relations

Attempts to define 'social movements' have long been met with contestation and objection on semantic and empirical grounds. In the past, movements have been characterised in a wide variety of ways. Much early sociological literature attempted to pathologise protesters and portrayed collective action as a disparagingly irrational psychic response to some structural strain (See Le Bon 1960 for example). Later scholars highlighted their revolutionary or

disruptive aims and others still have pointed to their constituent demographic or class, their structure, or their popularity, as a defining feature. Yet, closer examination of protest activity and popular mobilisation over the past 30 years has given rise to new insights (Crossley 2002). It has been observed for example that contemporary social movements rarely aim to seize or overthrow governmental powers and that hierarchical class-based mobilisations have in many arenas given way to more diverse and fluid modes of organisation. It has also been seen that group aims, composition, structure and the specific methods they choose to employ can vary greatly across times, spaces and physical locations. As such, and following Tarrow (1998), it is arguably more fruitful to identify social movements according to some of their common features, including informality and fluidity of structure; solidarity and the kind of actions in which they routinely engage, namely ‘contentious politics’ defined here as sustained and collective forms of engagement between claim-makers and the objects of their claims.

It has been argued that the study of contentious politics has little significance for questions of international security and state power. Even if one were to accept this reductive portrayal of IR’s disciplinary scope, social movement activity is demonstrably relevant. State governments will, at the very least, attempt to play a role in regulating or surveying the behaviour of political agents, even if they do not themselves constitute a direct target of movement claims. Yet, as McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001) claim, quite often at least one government will be a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims during episodes of contention.

Social movements, as claim-makers, have long been important agents for both bringing about change within societies and upholding the status quo. They consciously undertake actions that seek to problematise or defend the current institutional or normative order, lobbying

influential actors in line with their beliefs and aspirations and contributing to the evolution of cultural practice through their actions. In many ways, social movements are cultural innovators; they often defy established conventions, but even in defending them, they may experiment with new strategies for achieving their aims, updating customs and rituals to forward practice-based knowledge. As Crossley (2002:9) adds, “[s]ocial movements are, in effect, natural experiments in power, legitimation and democracy”. Their visibility, popularity and persuasiveness can serve as crucial indicators as to the health of domestic representative institutions and their active presence invites a range of questions around the origin and nature of political power in domestic society. Importantly, attention to the actions and pursuits of social movements can provide foundations upon which to challenge the traditional characterisation of the nation state as a unitary actor or ‘black box’.

The local and cultural changes that social movements achieve in the course of domestic claim-making are often reflected in broader foreign policy imperatives and positions on global issues (See for example Buechler 1990; Tripp, Casmiro and Kwesiga 2009; Roces and Edwards 2010; Fallon 2010). Government stances on human rights issues abroad as well as the challenges surrounding climate change and environmental protection have been heavily shaped by the normative considerations of ever more informed publics and the pressure brought to bear by activist networks (On this, see Keck and Sikkink 1998; Smith, Chatfield and Pagnucco 1997).

Importantly too, the increasing pace and intensity of global transactions and interconnectedness that has characterised the period from the latter part of the 20th century has altered the stakes for the modern nation state and by extension the world system. Advances in computer mediated technology, which have been exploited by a range of actors from political objectors to corporate and criminal networks, have made it a great deal harder

for nation states to carry out their observatory, regulatory and supervisory roles. Additionally, in issue areas where transnational solidarity networks have been forged, claim-makers have gained access to new avenues of recourse and assistance in making assertions against their own governments, transnational corporations and other powerful actors. The idea of community, which has traditionally been territorially delimited in the idea of the Westphalian nation state is arguably being supplanted by the decentralised, participatory and trans-border forms of community, organisation and action evidenced by transnational feminist movements, human rights and ecological movements, to name but a few (Peet and Vatts 2004). In these myriad ways, social movements have assisted in the transformation of the functional capacities, practices and jurisdiction of the nation state; issues that go straight to the heart of traditional IR theory.

2.3 The feminisation of art and aesthetics in International Relations

It is not just *what* social movements do that is important for a comprehensive understanding of power, social and political change, but also *how* they do it. At any one time, social movement actors tend to employ a variety of different strategies in their claim-making; their choices often, but not always, premised on expectations about efficacy and appeal. In amongst these strategic repertoires is a range of visual tools that are matched to differing circumstances in order to express felt emotion, communicate information and attract adherents. Throughout history, visual and other aesthetic interventions made by activists and dissidents have been adopted or absorbed in ways that transform the cultural field, alter modes of representation and challenge dominant ways of seeing. However, there has been even greater hesitation amongst IR scholars to take up questions of aesthetic bearing than those of popular mobilisation. Interestingly, even at a time of renewed interest in cultural politics and the psycho-analytics of emotion, literature addressing or interrogating the role of visual art in

politics and particularly international politics, remains conspicuous by its absence. As Christine Sylvester (2006) notes that IR has largely failed to recognise the myriad ways in which states have utilised the realm of art to compete for status and identity.

To IR's extra-disciplinary outsiders this is often quite surprising. It does not take any special proficiency in art history or the social sciences to recognise that there is an extremely rich history of interrelation between the visual arts and the realm of politics. Governments have printed posters *en-masse* as propaganda during wartime and portrait galleries the world over remind us to revere or revile our monarchs, religious leaders and other important political figures. Artworks are continually instrumentalised by governments and other influential political actors in order to define others as "...either oriented politically in a praiseworthy way or as misguided, dangerous, or diabolic" (Edelman 1995:50). The practice of transferring works of art between states also has a long and politically relevant history. Art objects have been bestowed as a symbol of diplomatic goodwill, as a marker of changed relations between powers or as invitation to corruption. Imperialist pursuits, pillage and plunder have also led to the relocation of art objects through history. This may be evidenced by a visit to any reasonably long-established European gallery. The British Museum, the Louvre in Paris, the Vatican or Uffizi galleries in Italy or the Hermitage in St. Petersburg all display antiquities acquired in the course of conflict or colonisation.

As Barbara Baudot (2010) neatly summarises, over the centuries, "...artists have described, borne witness to, interpreted, incited and accompanied political action. In a variety of ways they have stirred the human spirit into action, being the voice of revolution, making vivid the issues of the day". Artworks participate in the continual remodeling of the social and material aspects of lived experience; they allow one the creative freedom to express his/her innermost conflicts and desires, and they enable human beings to record the things they perceive to be

beautiful and to project their ideals onto a boundless future. Perhaps it is no wonder then that Plato worried about the power of poetry over man, arguing that such art forms should be placed under the exclusive control of the polity.

Yet, with the exception of a handful of works: special editions on art and aesthetics in *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* and *Review of International Studies* as well as a few independent contributions (See Sylvester 2009, Lisle 2006a; 2006b; Danchev 2011a; 2011b), literature investigating the relationship between art and International Relations remains marginal and fragmented at best. One can make educated guesses as to the reasons for this. Christine Sylvester for example, points to the fragmentation of the discipline into cliques or camps that have no pressing need to interact. Additionally however, conceptions about the appropriate research imperatives for IR remain beleaguered by outdated and deeply gendered distinctions. Recalling older realist efforts to delineate between the ‘high politics’ of security, militarism and diplomacy and the ‘low politics’ of economic, cultural and domestic affairs, it becomes clear that contestation around the boundaries of IR is nothing new. More to the point however, one ought also remember what a ‘feminist curiosity’ can bring to bear on this division. Cynthia Enloe (1989) famously interrogated the international realm of ‘high politics’, revealing the locations of women whose economic, social and cultural functions: as diplomatic wives; prostitutes; models and bourgeois tourists, are inextricably tied to the course of politicking between states. As she concluded ‘the personal is international’. In so doing, she revealed the patriarchal and contingent nature of IR’s dominant epistemological concerns.

Whilst many steps have since been taken to make feminist sense of IR, to deconstruct the gendered ‘packages of expectation’ upon which it relies and to make room for new voices; it would be naïve, even misleading, to declare the discipline free of gendered requirements and

stereotypes. This is evidenced by the very simple fact that some of the ‘IR camps’ that Sylvester describes are taken far more seriously than others, attract a great deal more project funding and receive far higher levels of institutional support. It is true to say that a superciliousness towards art and culture persists within the discipline. Those who seek to explore the multiple and complex interactions between politics and aesthetic experience frequently have their commitments to IR questioned and have sadly become accustomed to having their concerns deemed inferior, overly subjective, softer, even pedestrian, in comparison to the ‘more pressing’, ‘objective’ and ‘rationalizable’ questions of security, law, political economy and international organisation.

2.4 Art, democracy, folly

It might be reasonable to assume that cultural theorists and art historians would be a first port of call for scholarly insights into politically motivated art interventions of the kind examined in this thesis. Notably however, today’s art-world, informed by an increasingly strong postmodern aesthetic sensibility, exhibits a strong reluctance to endorse aesthetic interventions in the political field. Misgivings about politically committed art are premised on two inaccurate readings that have been taken up by the few scholars whose analytical work successfully bridges art and international politics. The first of these readings assumes that overtly political art is apolitical, even vacuous at the aesthetic level. The second assumes that the postmodern aesthetic sensibility necessarily presents a progressive, tolerant and genuinely democratic alternative based on its attendance to the heterogeneity of creative cultural practices.

The history of (Western) art prior to the twentieth century is often relayed in terms of a great debate between those supporting the use of art for social ends and those who produce and enjoy art for art’s sake (Baudot 2010). The former doctrine has its origins in classical

scholarship that sought to reveal the instrumental role of the arts in the development of a particular kind of society and mode of civilisation. It has since found its way into the future through English Romanticism, the Bauhaus movement and variants of Modernism; it has inspired revolutionary art as well as more contemporary forms of cultural governance but now remains forever tainted by the disturbing trials in social engineering undertaken by Nazi, Fascist and Communist states (Belfiore and Bennett 2008). By contrast, the latter position, which promotes *art pour le art* (art for art's sake), came to dominate the field in early 19th century. Proponents of this view argued that the only 'true' art, exists when fully divorced from any overt didactic purpose. Immanuel Kant, amongst others, has been cited as one of the forebears of this approach. Kant argued for the autonomy of the aesthetic through his comment that beautiful objects (where aesthetic appeal is judged against standards agreed in public discussion) are 'final without end' (Kant cited by Baudot 2010).

This debate waged on in the art-world until the twentieth century, when ideological drive and technological advances enabling mass production and mass consumption coalesced to bring forth a sea-change in the requirements and purposes for artistic endeavour. The opening of the art field prompted many observers to decry the 'end of art' and others to celebrate it as an emancipatory and truly democratic outcome. Towards the end of the twentieth century many artists and critics, moved to undermine what they saw as the totalising, Eurocentric and reductive trends of both modernism and aestheticism, giving birth to a range of postmodernist and postcolonial approaches associated with the elaboration of difference, separation, textuality and scepticism. Yet, as Boris Groys (2008) explains, even this emergent postmodern sensibility conceals a totalising potential:

This aesthetic taste is ostensibly very open, very inclusive- and in this sense also genuinely democratic. But ... postmodern taste is by no means as tolerant as it seems to be at first glance. The postmodern aesthetic sensibility in fact rejects everything

universal, uniform, repetitive, geometrical, minimalist, ascetic, monotonous, boring-
everything gray, homogenous and reductionist (ibid:150).

Indeed, it tends to discard any artistic intervention that expresses a broader political or social agenda, instead favouring the exotic, the edgy and the new.

Perhaps the most important work to date in terms of its effort to bridge literatures from IR and the arts has been Roland Bleiker's monograph on *'Aesthetics and World Politics'* (2009). In this work, Bleiker argues for an aesthetically informed approach to the study of international relations. For him, this involves reflecting upon political dilemmas in new and innovative ways; utilising the full range of knowledge practices and representational modes. Although he does not explain it in quite the same terms, Bleiker's concept of the aesthetic bears important parallels that of Ben Highmore (2010). Highmore's approach seeks to recover an older, broader-based definition of the term as it was elaborated by Baumgarten in the middle of the eighteenth century. As he explains, Baumgarten's field of 'aesthetics' (or, what Highmore calls 'social aesthetics') was intended as a branch of philosophy that would centre around the 'field of sensate perception and the lower cognate faculties'. It sought to provide a counterweight to philosophy's bias towards logic, which he argued left whole 'territories of life' unexplored.

Bleiker's aesthetics, whilst clearly informed by 'the field of sensate perception' (or 'affect' as discussed later on), unfortunately also misses entire territories of life. He dismisses offhand, all politically committed forms of art, claiming that, "[o]vertly committed art forms often do no more than promote a particular position. They may be political yes, but not aesthetically so. They are simply another way of expressing a political message. The fact that this message is conveyed through a song, a poem, a novel, a painting or a film is a mere coincidence. It has nothing to do with the aesthetic qualities of the art form itself" (ibid.:8). He draws a sharp

distinction between works that assert or advance a political opinion and those, which are less explicitly political; those, which instead alter perceptions and representations by virtue of a 'finer' ethic that lies latent in their aesthetic form.

This supposedly superior and more wholesome ethic may be described in terms of the art world's ongoing 'search for the new' (Groys 2008); its touted capacity to democratise the field of representation through appeal to a 'logic of equal aesthetic rights' (ibid.). Problematically though, the art world's 'search for the new', reflected most recently in the inclinations toward cultural multiplicity and localism that characterise the postmodern sensibility, cannot be seen in isolation from capital's need for continuous product diversification. A process of reflection and projection that for many is guided by a self-conscious detachment from all seemingly imposed universalisms has become unavoidably intertwined with the market-driven practices of cultural diversification which emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century to assign economic value to cultural identity (ibid.).

Bleiker and others are misguided in thinking that overtly political works of art necessarily lack substance at the aesthetic level. Institutional or state sponsored art is often heavily considered in terms of its appeal or challenge to formative principles as well as underlying value structures and sentimental power. Meanwhile, activist art production frequently provides spaces and means for the re-negotiation and re-elaboration of human subjectivities through affective encounters, exactly those 'lower cognate' or 'sensate perceptions' which an aesthetically informed approach should reveal. There is a great deal of interaction, influence and feedback between protest strategy, political expression and the cultural field. Additionally, Bleiker and many of his contemporaries have failed to recognise that the apparently fragmented and diverse social realities, which the postmodern aesthetic draws our attentions towards, are all implicitly connected by globalised markets, essentially making

them no less partial and instrumental than more overtly political works of art. Consequently, there is a strong case to be made for greater engagement with politically motivated works of art, including those of the kind investigated here under the label of ‘political street art’.

2.5 The category of ‘political street art’

Most people would claim to have a good idea of what street art is, yet the kind of characteristics that are commonly used to pin it down may on closer inspection, seem somehow insufficient. For instance, street art has become a descriptive label for more or less any creative work visible on the street, where ‘the street’ refers rather broadly to any determinable public space. Yet, as Riggle (2010) explains, such a definition excludes those works which have employed the street in their production but site the final piece elsewhere. He takes the work of contemporary (street) artist Space Invader as an example. Space Invader travels the globe, ‘conquering’ cities with his retrospective gaming mosaic. However, the definitive elements in his interventions are the maps of his ‘invasions’, which he prints, disseminates and has documented via gallery circuits. The definition also leaves open the possibility of including more or less *any* creative work or composition that is sighted/sited outdoors, including state-sponsored monuments to fallen national heroes, or even, at a logical extreme, artworks in transit from one indoor space to the next.

With these considerations in mind, any explanation that hinges solely on the ephemerality of the medium is also flawed. In his effort to provide a working definition of street art, Lyman Chaffee (1993) referred to ‘largely ephemeral media and its auxilliary forms’. Many works of graffiti, fly-posting and performance are situated only fleetingly, it is true, but given the right set of circumstances, wall-paintings and murals, even some posters might survive in situ for long periods of time. As Riggle (2010:244) rightly points out “Street art spans works that are utterly ephemeral and relatively enduring”. Efforts at preservation increase, particularly when

street art interventions are attributed a commercial or historical value by outside actors. Stencils by UK-based artist Banksy and France's Blek le Rat now sell for hundreds of thousands of pounds and Banksy's pieces were notably amongst the few interventions rendered 'untouchable' by local councils in an endeavour to clean up London's streets in preparation for the 2012 Olympics (Café 2012).

Another seemingly plausible characterisation of street art points to interventions that employ the street as an artistic resource. Riggle (2010) highlights that there are different ways of using the street art as a resource: utilising elements of the street as constructive materials or making the street a display space, for example. However, he warns that commercial enterprises also utilise these techniques: "Commercial art uses the street as an artistic resource in both senses—mass stencilling by movie production companies, posters, billboards, projected advertisements—but none of it is street art" (ibid. 2010: 246). Riggle's argument is that whilst the capacity for message conveyance or the rhetorical effect of an advertisement may hinge on its public, outdoor location, the actual meaning of an advertisement does not change if it is removed from the street. "...if removed, it might be ineffective commercial art, but it would still mean the same thing" (ibid: 246). Seemingly, for Riggle, street art is distinguishable as such, if and only if, its creative and material use of the street is internal to its meaning and if that meaning is fluid and free from the functional constraints placed by the needs of the market.

An attempt to identify street art according to its creative and material uses of the street seems viable. However, Riggle's attempt to separate a somehow unsullied street art from the purposes of marketing and commerciality bears a resemblance to Bleiker's proposed hierarchy of aesthetic merit and is thus rather more problematic than it initially seems. In the first instance, it is hard to delineate between artworks that seek to promote something and

those which do not. In the present day, street artists are frequently commissioned by governments and commercial enterprises to brighten up neglected urban zones, lead community cohesion projects or lend their own personal style for the purposes of brand creation. The strict imposition of zoning laws and surveillance in many parts of the world as well as penalties for vandalism and trespassing, make these kinds of patronage options increasingly tenable for street artists seeking to make ends meet. Additionally, even where aesthetic works do not attempt to sell a product or service as such, they might advertently or inadvertently advance particular ideologies or ways of life. In much of Western Europe and North America, for example street art as a sub-cultural manifestation has been captured and aggrandised in line with the commercialised postmodern flavour for the edgy and exotic.

The label political street art thus works satisfactorily to the extent that it can be used as a loose category for aesthetic interventions whose creative and material use of the street is necessary to the political meaning that the producer(s) wishes to convey; interventions, which scholars such as Bleiker (2009) would undoubtedly render as propaganda, devoid of aesthetic value. The category or definition employed necessarily leans towards the functional, as opposed to the institutional. As Bienfiore and Bennett (2006) highlight, "...an important ingredient in 'institutional' definitions of art is the concept of the 'art world', or the ensemble of institutions (museums, art galleries, academia, etc.) and people (art critics, art administrators, established artists, etc.) that make up the art establishment and that have the power to confer 'arthood' on an object". Since politically motivated street art has rarely been accepted as having the merit of true art (whatever that might be) and is increasingly dismissed by more radical perspectives on account of its homogenising emphasis, a category that invokes the properties of the artwork has a great deal more operational value than one that relies on institutional endorsement.

2.6 A review and refashioning of Social Movement Theory

The secret is to follow the advice the masters give you in their works while doing something different from them. (Edgar Degas n.d.)

Our age of anxiety is in great part, the result of trying to do today's job with yesterday's tools- with yesterday's concepts (Marshall McLuhan 1964: .8-9)

Protestors and political activists across the globe have long been aware of the importance of street art for their objectives. Not only is the presence of artistic influence, creative thought and design ubiquitous in the logos, banners, chants and other communicative media of domestic and transnational social movements but it is also often instrumental in the pursuit of claims against other parties. However, as is characteristic of International Relations more generally, literature from the broad body of social movement theory has failed to adequately address issues around the role and function of visual strategies in political protest. In spite of the renewed interest in cultural forms seen in the works of Eyermann and Jamison (1998), Jasper (1997) and Johnston and Klandermanns (1995), any interest in the particularities of artistic interventions and visual tools remains marginal to the political process tradition. If such visual strategies are mentioned at all they tend to be referred to only tangentially in works that take other and often, broader themes as their focus. Eyermann and Jamison (1998) for example, seek to elaborate on the myriad ways through which social movements contribute to processes of cultural transformation and learning, yet they take aural-verbal rather than visual forms as their primary object of focus. Treading a middle ground between systemic and performative approaches, discussions as to the role of culture, symbolism and iconography in Jasper (1997) and the Johnston and Klandermanns (1995) edited collection, remain at a far more general level and thus tend towards questions of how movements emerge or how they survive.

The work presented here suggests a way to correct this oversight, elucidating the range of theoretical and empirical gaps before moving on to demonstrate how pertinent insights from other schools and avenues of thought may be incorporated into the social movement literature in useful and novel ways. The sections that follow re-direct Charles Tilly's 'process oriented theory' to the level of the contentious performance with a view to explore the role and utility of street art as a protest strategy. The discussion then moves on to reconsider the ways in which 'political opportunity structure' and 'collective action frames' are commonly rendered by political process scholars. It incorporates lessons from McLuhan's media theories and the 'affective turn' in cultural theory in order to move towards a fuller comprehension of the processes within which activists operate and those which in turn operate upon them in the course of producing politically committed street art.

2.7 Revisiting political process: revealing gaps, revising 'performance'

Set into motion by the political turbulence of the 1960's, the study of social movements and collective action has proliferated and emerged as "one of the scholarly 'growth industries' in the social sciences, in both Europe and the United States" (McAdam et al 1996). Whilst social movement theory has developed along different trajectories in each of these regions, Coy (2001) notes that today, a broad epistemological consensus has emerged amongst a significant number of social movement theorists from both traditions. This consensus is evidenced in the political process approach, which develops upon the earlier resource mobilisation framework to emphasise "the structures through which people and resources are mobilised, their representations of the social world and the political context in which movements occur" (Schock 2005:26). The political process approach converges around three main sets of factors which are given primary importance in the analysis of social movements: organisational strength or 'mobilising structures', environmental conditions or 'political

opportunities'; and the collective processes of interpretation, attribution and social construction that mediate between opportunity and action, usually signalled by reference to 'framing processes' or 'cognitive liberation' (McAdam 1982). The sections that follow explore these three contributions in some detail and draw upon other literatures to suggest ways of widening the scope and utility of the latter two concepts in ways that can provide more insight into the function and utility of political street art.

'Mobilising Structures' are those arrangements through which individuals and resources are brought into synthesis for the purposes of contentious action. Such structures or networks may pre-date and help engender contentious action or they may emerge as protest becomes routine and sustained. Scholars working from within the political process approach have highlighted several modes of organising. Often mobilisation is possible via allied organisations. At other times some level of appropriation is possible whereby burgeoning or new movements are able to absorb marginalised and disenchanted groups. However, scholars have been quick to point out that 'mobilising structures' are determined in large part by environmental conditions, and as Meyer (2004:126) has stated, "The key recognition in the political opportunity perspective is that activists' prospects for advancing particular claims, mobilising supporters, and affecting influence are context-dependent".

In theory, almost anything external to the movement can have a facilitating or constraining effect on contentious action, but scholars have tended to focus on several key dimensions, most notably: the degree of regime openness (including access to centres of power and the state's propensity/capacity for violence); the existence of elite divisions/realignments and access to influential allies at home or abroad (See for example: Tilly 2006; Keck and Sikkink 1998). As Schock (2005) rightly notes, to date, much of the political process literature on political opportunity has taken protest in democratic regimes as its focus and has

unfortunately become characterised by a general neglect of the mediating influence of agency and strategy in favour of a more structural and systemic focus. “Political process scholars have traditionally been most concerned with mobilisation processes, to a lesser extent with the mechanisms that link movement actions and characteristics with outcomes” (ibid:35). Additionally, there is a profound bias in these works, towards the discretely measurable, tangible and observable changes to a single, objective environmental matrix. As a result, the literature tends to under-specify the mediating effects of unprocessed, non-rationalised sensations, perception and the presence of alternate existential possibilities or ‘immanence’, in discussions of political manoeuvring.

Charles Tilly’s work on ‘regimes’ and ‘repertoires’ has made some particularly significant contributions in terms of its attention to collective action in non-democracies and its insights into strategy but unfortunately it falls short in regard to the latter need for a more open reading of the ‘political opportunity structure’, or indeed ‘structures’, invoking the plural. In 1977, Tilly first put forth the idea that actors engaged in contentious politics make use of a ‘repertoire’ of varied actions in their endeavours to articulate claims against others. These delimited sets of actions or ‘contentious performances’ became the focus of his later monographs on collective action, ‘Regimes and Repertoires’, (2006) and the posthumously published ‘Contentious Performances’ (2008). In these works, Tilly sought to develop a process-oriented approach that would draw scholarly attention to the characteristics of strategic repertoires. Tilly’s empirical work shows that repertoires tend to be systematised, calling upon shared scripts and invoking existing routines or conventions. Changes in protest activity tend to occur only incrementally and are determined in quite a large measure by nature of governing regime:

From the top-down, governmental policies and relations among established political actors constitute a political opportunity structure that limits the chances for

ordinary people to make collective claims either on governments or on other actors...From the bottom-up, previously established performances and repertoires likewise limit the initiatives available to ordinary people... (Tilly 2006:16)

In spite of his reference to Michael Mann's distinction between the *despotic* and *infrastructural* strengths of government, which might serve as a springboard for the exploration of a range of ideational governmental devices, Tilly's own work in fact narrows the field and potential of 'political opportunity' considerably. Firstly, he registers and compares regime types across instances by way of composite measures of government capacity and level of democracy, derived impressionistically from the annual reports of monitoring bodies such as Freedom House, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Whilst useful and indicative, this approach fails to adequately capture the full range and relative successes of the material, ideological, technological and cultural apparatus employed by states in their attempts to control and coordinate the hearts, minds and bodies of their subjects.

Based on his indices, Tilly predicts that high-capacity, non-democratic governments tend to impart a more centralised arbitrary power, whilst "...low capacity nondemocratic regimes open the way to many small tyrants" (Tilly 2006:210). As a result, civil wars are prone to be a more regular occurrence in the latter than the former. Further, democratic regimes with low government capacity tend to uphold a minimum of rights and liberties but the domestic sphere remains vulnerable to bouts of disorder and violence. "By contrast, high capacity democratic regimes endure little violence in their domestic politics, even if they make up for it by their violence in external wars" (ibid.:210). Even if one were to tentatively accept the virtues of Tilly's empiricism for the purposes of predictive modelling, challenges remain. Notably, his indices do not assist very much in the study of the more capricious or uncertain periods in political history, times of representational crisis, political reorientation or indeed

democratic transition. Nor do they adequately reflect the broader spectrum of material and ideational factors at play; the multiple, mutable and fleeting ‘opportunity structures’ within any national arena nor the social, pre-cognitive and pre-rational impulses that constitute the active arena. Macro-indicators cannot shed light on such factors in the way that a closer and more qualitative case study might.

Furthermore, whilst Tilly’s attention to so-called performances and repertoires does indicate greater attention to the role of agency and strategy than is usually evident in the political process literature, his work here might still be extended to greater effect. Based on descriptions in the 2006 and 2008 books it is possible to glean the understanding that performances are, for Tilly, communicative actions or interactions that are learned and adapted according to the balance of opportunities and threats posed in any given socio-historical context. According to his framework, there are four possible levels of uniformity or levels of analysis that are relevant to contentious claim making: actions, interactions, performances and repertoires. He argues that learning, strategising and change occur predominantly at the level of performances rather than at the level of individual action, interaction or the entire repertoire. In general, he claims that “...participants in contentious politics learn how to match performances with local circumstances, to play their own parts within those performances, and to modify performances in the light of their effects” (2008:18). Resultantly, there is a strong case to be made for paying greater attention to activity at the level of the performance. However, Tilly’s expressed interest in the balance between continuity and improvisation in the means that people employ to make contentious claims mean that his work focuses more on the evolution of the whole than on the particularities, uses and vices of specific kinds of performance. In other words, his analysis runs more at the level of the repertoire than at the level of the performance itself. As a result, the concrete strategies utilised in political struggle, remain underspecified, the micro-

mechanisms of their internal dynamics, underexplored and their importance to processes of cultural transformation, unacknowledged.

2.8 Framing political contention

The term ‘frame’ as employed here (and following Goffman 1974; Snow et al. 1988), is one of the most recent imports to political process theory and refers to a persuasive device used to fix particular meanings, organise experience and guide action. Described by Goffman (1974) as shared ‘schematas of interpretation’, frames may be generated purposefully by political agents to focus the attention of a target audience on specific dimensions of a conflict or particular ways of understanding the issues in contentious politics.

Snow et al (1986:466) explain that successful mobilisation requires, in the very first instance, a thorough revision of the manner in which people look at some problematic condition or feature of their life, such that social arrangements which are normally perceived as right and inescapable “come to seem both unjust and mutable”. McAdam (1982) labels this process as ‘cognitive liberation’ and argues that often, the generation and adoption of an injustice frame is required in order for it to take place. The notion of injustice has resonance in most world cultures, but in the absence of a societal inclination towards action and in contexts characterised by fear, the challenge for movement leaders, as Tarrow (1998) notes, is to successfully orient frames toward the specifics of the target group’s context and culture, playing to their values, objectives and emotional registers.

Notably, these discussions over framing and cognitive liberation have certain parallels with Frankfurt School-inspired arguments about the creation of salubrious conditions for change and transformation. Nicolas Kompridis (2006) for instance, attempts to revive the Frankfurt School ethic in his detailed discussion of Heidegger’s concept of ‘world disclosure’. World disclosure describes the process of making things intelligible to human beings; making sense

of ourselves and our place in the world. He argues that disclosure involves both receptivity and activity in the sense that it is a cyclical and ongoing process. 'Pre-reflective disclosure' or first order disclosure refers to background structures and the very conditions for intelligibility. These vary temporally as well as across geographical and cultural space. For Kompridis, following Heidegger, a pre-reflective disclosure is 'always already' in operation; it is pre-received. 'Rediscovery' or 'reflective disclosure' then refers to the second order action of de-centering or re-focusing (read subverting) these received understandings. Through the notion of rediscovery, Kompridis highlights the important function of shifting social and cultural practices in re-revealing or as we might say, *re-framing* the world, it's background structures and relations of power, such that receivers might perceive anew the possibility of alternative orders and self-understandings. All disclosures, whether received or re-oriented, incorporate hidden relations of power and domination. The impetus to supplant one order for the next usually arises from a critical impulse born of crisis; exactly that sense of something gone awry to which Snow et al (1986) refer.

The success of mobilisation efforts is far from guaranteed and may depend to a very large degree upon the empirical commensurability of movement rhetoric and the correspondence of any framing effort with the target audiences' lived experience. Notably, contentious performances as described by Tilly, frequently do framing work. Indeed, they can be 'performative', directly or indirectly constituting their object through their projections. However, the two lines of enquiry are not really brought together in Tilly's texts or in the framing literature. Additionally, whilst the body of work on framing represents an important step in the process of bringing agency back into the analysis, it may be subject to criticism on several grounds. In the first instance, evaluation of the literature reveals a lack of systematic investigation into the relative merits of different kinds of what we may now call 'performances' for the purposes of guiding interpretation. Moreover, and as Benford

(1997:411) points out, “[t]he bulk of the social movement framing scholarship has focused on conceptual development or on the application of framing concepts to specific cases” but it has contributed few detailed empirical enquiries into how activists and collectives plan and administer their framing efforts and how these framing efforts work over human faculties and human bodies to shape action.

Pertaining to the latter point about the mechanics of framing, it has been convincingly argued that current descriptions of framing under-specify the role of affective states in abetting or hindering; indeed largely determining, the course of processes of ‘cognitive liberation’. A recent work by Deborah Gould argues convincingly for an affective turn in social movement theory, underscoring the important difference between the non-rational, unpredictable bodily affects imbued with potential for change or stasis and the cognitive processes of interpretation and liberation, which follow them and determine their effects. Affect is a slippery term and Gregg and Seigworth (2010) count least eight different modes of usage in current scholarship. The way the term is used by Gould draws on the work of Brian Massumi such that affect is treated as a non-conscious and non-rationalised experience of intensity that results from external stimuli and precedes cognition but may yet incite action. Russell (2003), whose work emerges more directly from the field of psychology, regards “core affect” as an energy that can be experienced as either positive or negative. In both studies, affect is deemed distinct from ‘feelings’, which describe sensations that have been rationalised, checked against previous sensual experience and categorised in the mind of the subject. In discussions around the value and function of art in the social world, the import of affect reflects concerted efforts to capture conceptually, the kinds of pure sensations and responses, even the sense of ‘intrinsic value’ that is accorded in experiencing some artworks; impacts upon the body which exist beyond or independent of discursive impositions.

Gould claims that the emotional/cultural and phenomenological turn seen in the later political process works of: Jasper (1997); Eyermann and Jamison (1998); and McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1996) have gone a long way in terms of de-pathologising the emotions of protest. However, she suggests that even these bold and progressive works remain wedded to the rational actor tradition due to the persisting anxiety that any move away from the rationalisable will lay the path for a return to the disparaging representations of protest which emerged with Sighele and Le Bon's work on collective behaviour. So for example, whilst emphasising the important point that social movements are knowledge producers and key drivers of social change and cultural transformation, Eyermann and Jamison's approach still relies on an explanatory formula that repeatedly "calls attention to the creative role of consciousness and cognition in all human action, individual and collective" (1998: 21). Gould (2010) makes the counter-claim that not all meaningful political actions and creative activities are driven by such rationalisations nor are they the irrational imperatives of the mad and the bad. Instead it is argued that some actions emerge from states of 'pre-rationalisation' or affective encounter (ibid.).

Following the recent steps taken in cultural theory, Gould explores the idea that we can learn much more about the actual mechanics of cognitive liberation, movement socialisation and the possibilities for social stasis and change by recognising that quite often something happens to the body before discursive frames or rhetorical devices can do their work on our cognitions. Some *thing*, *energy* or *state of being* has to be harnessed in these processes. Importantly then, affect can be thought of in terms of the body's potential to act, a potential, which may subsequently be harnessed by a range of discursive and rhetorical tools that may be simultaneously present in contentious performances. Importantly, this re-orientation draws attention to something distinct from and greater than the instrumental potentials of contentious performances. By invoking the concept of affect it becomes possible to think

about the ways in which activists might be moved to produce street art or be moved by producing; the ways in which affective states might be transmitted through sensory contact with street art interventions as well as the ways that affect capture becomes a factor in the very possibilities for mobilisation.

Crucially, “affect is important to the extent that it is autonomous and outside social signification” (Hemmings 2005:549). In this way, it seems to exist in a reserved space, one of the few conceptual advances able to defy both the rationalising endeavours of older social theory and postmodernist preoccupation with deconstruction (ibid).

2.9 Expanding the parameters of political opportunity

Thus far, the discussion presented here has exposed certain weaknesses in the existing political process literature. It has highlighted the neglect of visual modes in the literature around protest and contestation. Indeed, it has argued that performance, strategy and framing remain under-theorised more generally. Additionally, it has suggested that the defiant attachment to positivist and empiricist methods in the modelling of political opportunity structures, results in reductionist and distortionary accounts of action and social change. As the following sections endeavour to demonstrate, these weaknesses might be gainfully tackled through appeals to insights from other disciplines and avenues of research. It is first argued that there is scope for converging the insights of political process theorists with scholars of nonviolence, who place much greater emphasis on the mediating influence of political agency and strategy in movement trajectories. Taking onboard some key lessons from Marshall McLuhan’s work on media forms as well as Gould and others’ elaborations of affect, the discussion then moves on to consider the ways in which contentious performances may function by (re)constituting ‘anti-environments’, re-mapping or re-framing existing political opportunities at the local level.

Sociologist Kurt Schock notes that in the last fifty years there has been a shift in the prevailing repertoire of contentious methods from armed guerrilla action to nonviolent action, which he defines in terms of "...an active process of bringing political, economic or moral pressure to bear in the wielding of power in contentious interactions between collective actors" (Schock 2005:6). This process may occur through acts of omission, acts of commission, or a combination of both. Where the former refers mainly to acts of noncompliance, the latter refers to the use of innovative measures intended to disrupt social and political convention. Notably, whilst the political process approach views violent and nonviolent performances as part of a broad spectrum of contention, the tradition of scholarship on nonviolence draws a conceptual distinction between violent and nonviolent actions against the government, arguing for the particular merits of the latter. Where political process theorists have on the whole been less clear on the actions and choices made in collective action which feed into the political context in various ways, nonviolence scholars work more to specify exactly how agency, strategy and the comparative utility of protest tools are crucial to the functioning and progress of movements. As a consequence, and as Schock (*ibid.*) rightly points out, there is some scope for cross-fertilisation.

In particular, there is a current of thought running through the nonviolence literature, which suggests that if nonviolent actions are utilised by agents in a calculated, efficient and conscientious manner, they may engender changes in existing power relations that violent actions could not. Sharp (1975) notes that the use of force against unarmed civilians is more likely to erode a government's legitimacy at home and abroad. He explains that if government legitimacy is questioned, elite divisions may emerge and segments of the military may be likely to disobey orders to use repressive violence against activists. Additionally, he postulates that international observers, transnational non-governmental organisations (TNGOS), intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), and foreign governments

may be more likely to take action in defence of citizens if they perceive repression to be directed at the unarmed because this indicates that the government's rule is based on force rather than legitimacy and democratic right. For Sharp (ibid.) and his contemporaries, the particularities of nonviolent performances are imperative to political outcomes. Importantly, it is possible to extrapolate from this insight a much more general claim about the importance of strategy; that in analysing contentious politics one must always attend to the characteristics and possibilities that are offered by the performance type employed as well as the surrounding context or social milieu. Therefore, in addition to the conceptual distinction that nonviolence scholars draw between violent and nonviolent action, one might also consider, for instance, the relative utility of aural/linguistic versus visual strategies; subversive versus public modes of dissent and the diverse ways in which these strategic choices may co-act with the surrounding environment to reveal new possibilities for contention or close down on them.

In attending to this relationship between contentious performance and political opportunity, scholarly works from communications theory provide even further possibilities for conjecture and advance. In 1964, communications theorist Marshall McLuhan made the wide reaching argument that *'The Medium is the Message'*. For him, all communicative media to which individuals are exposed, work over them completely, affecting influence not only through their delivered discursive content but also in the ways that they work constitutively as environments in and of themselves. McLuhan (1964:41) expresses that all media forms "...evoke in us unique ratios of sense perceptions" adding that, "The extension of any one sense alters the way we think and act- the way we perceive the world" (ibid.). Therefore, seemingly pervasive climates and configurations are deemed mutable. Indeed, according to McLuhan, sources of social power and the media that uphold them, can and should be

revealed through appropriations and foils; alternate uses of media, which engender ‘anti-environments’ or ‘counter-situations’.

Building in Gould’s more directed insights with regard to framing, it can be argued that the ways in which contentious performances ‘work over people’ involves two interacting planes of human experience: the affective⁴ and the cognitive. Importantly, the projection and shared recognition of ideologies, collective and inter-subjective understandings about political events, threats and opportunities are premised on the possibility of conditioning the way that social actors feel, see and think about the world around them. This occurs in a process by which discursive structures and representational practices repeatedly harness and interrelate with the autopoeic. Understanding framing and political opportunity in this way is significant on the one hand because it acknowledges that prior to being fixed in meaning, affective states can shock or shake people out of ingrained ways of thinking about and understanding the world. In addition, it serves to highlight how “affect greases the wheels of ideology but it also gums them up” (Gould 2009:27). In other words, because there is not and cannot be a linguistic construction that fully captures that which defies cognition; framings, ideologies and other rhetorical devices that seek to co-opt and mobilise are never wholly fulfilling options, always leaving open, the possibility of refusal by the subject and the possibility of ‘better matched’ counter-frames. Herein the concept of affect seems also to provide an explanation of sorts for the problem of intentionality.

The circularity and contingency of constitutive power suggested here serves as an indicator as to the inadequacy of static country level indices, such as those used by Tilly, to map political opportunity. Opportunities and motivations for political action are dependent on the elaboration of shared and evolutionary understandings about what is actually going on in the

⁴ I choose to use the term affect rather than the ‘lower cognitive faculties’ because the latter term retains a cognitive bias and implies a necessary subordination of sensory experience to the rationalisable.

world around. Macro-indicators may contribute to this understanding yet contentious performances may work variously over individuals, groups or whole communities, temporarily shifting bodies, minds or both and revealing in their wake novel possibilities for action and revisions to existing notions of order. Quite importantly, it is often these temporary and even localised shifts in mood, perception and self-understanding that bring new actors into the fold and lend confidence to activists even when the stakes are high.

Notably, McLuhan's major concern was with the advance of electronic technology rather than the low technology medium of street art, but he was careful to note that "[s]ocieties have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication" (ibid.). Whilst this is a bold and possibly overstated claim, it strikes at the core of two basic, and often overlooked facts. The first of these recaps on the point made by framing scholars; that *without some kind of intervention*, human cognitions rarely register the broader structural conditions which envelop and guide them. The second point to be made is that what human beings say, is not always entirely straightforward. On the one hand, the reporting of slow, incremental changes to productive relations and social norms has quite often been neglected in favour of the more palpable messages and dramatic short term shifts, which layer over them. Rather than taking this delivered content at face value, attention to the nature and function of the dominant communicative media can provide important indicators as to the stage of a society's technological and moral progress, "the change of scale or pace or pattern(s)" (ibid.:8) in human interactions. It is imperative to look beyond delivered discursive content because additional pieces of information may be embedded or disguised for commercial or political reasons. We know for instance that advertisers frequently employ subtexts in visual and audio media as a means to encourage consumption. Also, in contexts characterised by a repressive state apparatus, the substance of public dialogues does not always reflect the true sentiments of either the state or lay actors, as

risk of international condemnation and violent retribution pose respective existential threats to each party. In such instances, the ways and means that messages are projected might reveal a great deal more about social and political conditions than what is actually overtly said.

The anonymous practices of disclosure, veiled modes of resistance and cautiously executed contentious performances that sometimes accompany periods of repressive rule can be understood in broader reference to Scott's work on 'infrapolitics' (Scott 1992). Scott's key premise is that structurally similar modes of domination will give rise to broadly comparable patterns of resistance. He posits that in contexts characterised by repressive government machinery, the subjugated may be seen to cooperate with the authorities unproblematically in public dialogues, often in fear of reprisal. Yet, offstage they will always question their subordination. The concept of infrapolitics describes the ways in which insubordinations and dissenting behaviors are disguised or veiled to avoid retaliation. The term deliberately draws attention to the 'infrastructure' of politics, emphasising that it is the very possibility of being able to develop collective critical understandings and dissenting behaviours out of the view of the authorities that enables resistance movements to germinate. Medium, subtext and the possibility of outright deceit may all be relevant in revealing the full matrix of opportunities for collective claim making.

This is one of the areas in which Jacqueline Adams' novel work on *arpillera*⁵ production in Chile falls short. To date, Adams's work of 'visual sociology' is the only one that seeks to bring the insights of political process scholarship to bear on visual tools. Her essays on female *arpillera* producers sponsored by the *Vicaría de la Solidaridad* (Vicariate of Solidarity), during the Pinochet Regime in Chile demonstrate how the process of collective art production can socialise activists and boost feelings of solidarity (Adams 2000). She also

⁵ *Arpilleras* or *cuadros* are highly detailed hand-sewn tapestries, originating in Chile and Peru.

shows how the art product itself can mobilise support from abroad by framing the domestic context in a way that emotes and has resonance with the values of an outside audience (ibid. 2002). Adams expounds on the work of political scientist Lyman Chaffee in claiming that:

Art...can be the locus of an oppositional voice (Chaffee, 1993:16;Vila, 1992). It can convey meaning and values that shape behavior imperceptibly, leading to the erosion of totalitarian regimes (Wicke, 1992). Art can indicate to nonmovement members that there is an active opposition movement, and this can be a way for a movement to threaten the regime...Street art under authoritarian regimes "connotes an activist, collective sense. In essence, it becomes a form of psychological warfare against the dominant culture and elite and reveals an emerging subterranean movement. This is threatening because it connotes a prelude to an organized opposition, or the existence of one... The act [of producing street art] symbolizes a culture of resistance exists that dictators pretend to ignore" (Chaffe[e], 1993:30). Finally, control over artistic production in authoritarian regimes influences the form art takes (Szemere, 1992; Wicke, 1992). (ibid.:28-29)

Important and informative though they are, many of these insights can and ought to be pushed further. By invoking the conceptual distinction between public and surreptitious modes of dissent or, using Scott's preferred terminology, public versus hidden transcripts, the actions of the *arpillera* producers could be seen more clearly as a particular example of infrapolitics; veiled performances that greatly facilitate awareness and opposition building in a context characterised by perceptions of despotic government, absence of the rule of law and a high risk of penalty for recalcitrant activity. For example, Adams writes that the womens' resistance was mostly quiet, non-confrontational and often clandestine: "Much of it was self-protection and community affirmation: ways of holding one's ground and refusing to be beaten down..." (Adams 2012:156).

Whilst acts of insubordination including divisive and cynical aesthetic interventions may be expertly disguised during more restrictive periods of government, once repression has eased and the fear of retaliation subsides, it may be possible to uncover a much fuller array of what Scott and others refer to as ‘everyday forms of resistance’. As yet underdeveloped however, is any kind of account as to how visual interventions, that originate as examples of infrapolitics, function in contexts characterised by tumult, crisis and transition; how, for instance, the roles of such performances adapt and feed into the shift from authoritarian to democratic rule and what psycho-social function they perform for their producers.

The theoretical contributions brought together in this chapter reflect a concerted effort to broaden and deepen the political process approach elaborated by Tilly and his contemporaries. Firstly, shifting the analytical focus to the level of actors and their performances helps to redirect scholarly attention toward agency, strategy and human experience in contentious politics. Insights from theorists of nonviolence reveal the ways in which we might draw novel conceptual distinctions to facilitate new avenues for research, most notably the relative utility of linguistic versus visual strategies and subversive versus public modes of dissent. Revisiting and highlighting Marshall McLuhan’s work on media and James Scott’s investigation into subversive tactics importantly lends scope and purpose to these conceptual distinctions. McLuhan suggests that the direct and palpable messages delivered to us via official sources and outlets are not always indicative of the real mechanics of social change, he instead encourages a focus on the communicative medium itself; how does the performance medium affect movement outcomes? Relatedly, Scott’s investigation into performances under domination, what he terms infrapolitics, paves the way for further investigation into the role and use of subtext, symbolism and veiled insubordination as protest strategies. Like Kompridis, McLuhan encourages us to explore cultural practices for signs of immanent alternatives to dominant our self-conceptions and contextual

understandings. One cannot verify these alternate existential options scientifically and they are not generally accessible via macro indicators and indices *a la* Tilly, but that does not preclude their existence. McLuhan essentially educates us in the practical matter of using media not only the constitution but importantly in the recasting and reframing of cognitions about the surrounding environment or what we might term the political opportunity structure. Meanwhile, Gould's revision of the framing literature sheds light on the ways in which affect in fact provides the fertiliser for political action.

2.10 Synthesising insights, cues and precedents

So far it has been argued that social movement scholars and political analysts should focus greater attention on the role and function of street art in contentious politics not just on the basis of its predictable and instrumental potentials which have lamentably been neglected in the literature but also on the basis of the affective encounters which always surround it. Social movement theorists are often criticised for being distant from the movements they are talking about. It is my contention that if we want to close this gap and come closer to understanding what street art can do in protest, the ways and means by which it can contribute to processes of social change; then we should not ignore the muddles of matter cognition and affect that aid, impel and in many cases complicate political action. Most political activists, indeed most human beings, would probably admit that a painting or piece of music has stirred something in them in ways that they cannot immediately put words to. This capacity to stir is absolutely relevant for successful claim-making. I suggest that rationalising it away only distorts the story.

Carrying forward these insights as crucial extensions and revisions to political process, it is possible to enter a more general discussion and offer a range of suggestions around what street art might be able to do in protest. In the section that follows, I synthesise some of the

objective and subjective dimensions outlined above, the instrumental and the affective, and I discuss them in relation to my three guiding questions.

a) What social and political conditions might encourage a turn to street art as a mode or strategy in contentious politics?

One quite basic way that street art may function as an instrument of power is when it is operationalised as a marker of physical boundaries. These kinds of interventions may be particularly prevalent when territory is at issue or when it becomes a symbolic prize in a revolutionary struggle. Since the 1960's, political rivalries between Republican and Loyalist supporters in Northern Ireland, have often been played out in the visual realm through large scale-mural painting. The Belfast murals have served several functions; some murals served an allegorical function, depicting important scenes from Irish history in order to muster nationalist sentiments. Others have been painted as a means to champion the ideology of one or other side, glorify the paramilitary groups or commemorate those who have died during the troubles.⁶ In the aftermath of the 1969 Battle for Bogside, John Casey's large scale painted slogan "you are now entering free Derry" declared the area of Bogside as a liberated Catholic zone and warned the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) to stay out. Similarly, after Franco's accession to power in Spain, Barcelona's Camp Nou stadium remained a *zona de la libertad* (liberated zone) and was demarcated as such by painted banners and flags displaying the Catalan colours. It became one of the only venues in which Catalan resistance could be openly expressed in the following decades (Karon 2012). Graffitied banners and walls have also been used much more recently to demarcate liberated zones during the revolutionary uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. These examples demonstrate how street art may be used to reframe physical spaces and establish new material borders between rival groups.

⁶ 'The troubles' conventionally refers to the period of political conflict over the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. The period is usually dated as beginning in the late 1960's and ending with the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, although violence also occurred outside these dates.

Relatedly, in her work on ‘globalized fences’ Feigenbaum (2010) explores two specific ways in which activists might also use street art to alter the function of externally or state-imposed barriers like “the separation fence in Israel/Palestine, the fence at the U.S./Mexico border, the fences surrounding immigration detention centers and the fences fortifying the temporary sites of global superpower gatherings” to their own ends. In ways that bear clear relation to the work of McLuhan, she highlights how resistance movements may operationalise aural and visual strategies, including graffiti, in ways that reconstitute the fence either as an Information Communication Technology (ICT) or as a canvas. Feigenbaum notes that in an age of advanced technology and increasing dematerialisation, the communicative function of such physical barriers is almost always forgotten. Yet, “[t]o exclude these technologies from our definitions of ICTs is to act as if they are in fact exceptions, rather than guiding principles, architectures and artifacts of our time” (Agamben, 1998 cited by Feigenbaum 2010:130).

It can be convincingly argued that one of the reasons that street art has remained amongst the guiding principles and artifacts of our time; an ‘ICT’ following Feigenbaum or a ‘low technology mode of mass communication’, following Chaffee (1993), is precisely because it is quite often produced with relatively little technological know-how or financial resources. Yet, by virtue of its public, outdoor placement, the content it transmits, may reach a large audience. Rather importantly, street art interventions maintain this utility even in the face of growing global uptake of social networking and other forms of computer mediated communication precisely because they provide a channel for expression for groups otherwise excluded from the political process by geographical, financial, literacy, or racial requisites; groups that have been ‘excommunicated’ in the words of Armand Mattelart (2008).

In the first instance, high-speed broadband links, which enable the rapid upload of images

and data, live streaming and web-conferencing remain predominantly a feature of the Global North and mainland countries. Many island states, and more geographically remote areas remain relatively isolated and face great financial, technical and environmental obstacles to further technological integration. Additionally, it remains a sad fact that in many societies across the world, electronically mediated communication is cost-prohibitive for a significant proportion of the population. As of 2011 for instance, a mere 13% of the population on the African continent had access to the world wide web, only 26 % of Asians and only 35 % of those in Latin American and the Caribbean. To date, only 32% of the world population are estimated to have internet access (Internet World Stats 2012). For many of these individuals, illiteracy and/or gender pose additional layers of obstruction. An approximate figure of 783 million adults are illiterate and over two-thirds of these individuals are to be found in just eight countries: Bangladesh, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Pakistan (World Demographics Profile 2012). Of this figure, two-thirds are women.

In a discussion about the historical motivations for producing street art in Latin America, Lyman Chaffee (1993) constructs several categories relating to the instrumental and strategic uses of street art which can be read as responses to excommunication. He mentions the ‘street culture/receiver explanation’; the ‘identity explanation’ and the ‘marginalized group/alternative media explanation’. Firstly, he explains that in the Hispanic world, stark and persistent inequalities mean that a great number of people lack access to print media. Established daily routines however, command that they spend a great deal of their time outside of their homes engaged in informal labour practices. As a result, a relatively efficient and logical way to communicate with or amongst the populace is through the use of street graphics. Notably, this is how many small traders in towns and cities across the developing world still advertise their wares; utilising hand painted billboards and other signs to inform and attract custom. In certain cities, towns and communities in Latin America, activity on the

street is so extensive, that it may be feasible to think of actors on the street as constituting a pre-existing mobilising structure during times of contention.

Lyman Chaffee's 'identity explanation' (Chaffee 1993) hinges on the use of street art as a vehicle for subcultures and marginalised groups to gain recognition. This was a key motivation for the Chicano art movement, which emerged in the North American South-West in the 1960s. Here, mural production was linked to a broader effort to reinvigorate Latin cultural heritage and gain greater social acceptance. Linked with this observation, is the 'marginalized group/alternative media explanation'. According to Chaffee (ibid.), marginalized groups, subcultures or even opposition parties who lack access to impartial mainstream media outlets are often motivated to seek out alternative modes of communication or even develop their own media systems in order to make their voices more clearly heard.

Rickards (1971) also offers some useful insights around this point. In his work on the history of the poster he notes that in a less literate society, the printed word on the street had an authority of its own. It provided a direct point of contact between ruler and ruled, and delivered a proclamation that often had to be read out. It was a symbol of power and mechanism of control. He explains that even the history of Europe may be read in a series of proclamations:

There were proclamations too, not only from the invading enemy but from dissident cells and factions. The idiom was adopted by the under-dogs who, in counter-proclamations, spoke back to authority in terms of authority. For long periods the printed proclamation was the sole medium of mass communication. In museums and libraries all over Europe they still remain, proclaiming to each other for posterity (Rickards 1971:9).

Rickards' comment points us in the direction of some important psychosocial considerations in utilising street art as a performance or protest strategy. In part, these revolve around perceptions about who has hold over *la opina de la calle* (the opinion on the street) (Chaffee 1993). In much of the developing world the street remains an extremely important site of struggle and levels of street-based activity are often read as a barometer of (dis)content by politicians, citizens and political analysts alike (Dangl 2006). For this reason, in Latin America prevailing norms have often given credence to the use of populist tactics; financial patronage and the use of street art in electioneering, measures which lend candidates an aura of egalitarianism and project the understanding that they are somehow 'close to ordinary people'.

During times of repression, the presence of oppositional graffiti may serve a slightly different but equally important psychosocial purpose. As Chaffee (1993:30) explains:

...under authoritarian regimes, the underground production of street art connotes an activist, collective sense. In essence, it becomes a form of psychological warfare against the dominant culture and elite and reveals an emerging subterranean movement. This is threatening [to regimes] because it connotes a prelude to an organized opposition, or the existence of one. The repression of street art may not be directed at the message but at the symbol the act conveys. The act symbolizes a culture of resistance that dictators pretend to ignore. This denial of resistance and of alternative views was particularly evident in the old communist regimes.

Notably, when repression against African National Congress (ANC) supporters increased in South Africa in the latter part of the 1980's, anti-apartheid activists opted to adopt a variety of new visual strategies for disseminating information to the public (See Mbeki 2011; Greenwald and MacPhee 2010). Stencilling, graffiti and silkscreen printing on t-shirts and other textiles enabled the movement to maintain a strong visual presence and even as the

army descended on the townships. These visual strategies played an important role in establishing an underground media system. “[a]s opposed to ‘alternative media’ which connotes the presence of an open pluralistic system, underground street art is that which breaks the complicity of silence under authoritarianism and indicates that an opposition is presence and active” Chaffee (1993:16).

Veiled street art interventions which can be labelled as acts of infrapolitics, following Scott, may be used to announce marches and dissident meetings, project the logos and colours of opposition groups and convey facts and information that contrasts the official government line. In these ways, street art can help to break the state’s monopoly on information or ‘misinformation’. Additionally, if the mainstream media lacks integrity and impartiality, as has often been the case under periods of authoritarian rule a vacuum can result, providing a space for the emergence of street art. Excommunications, whether economic, social or political thus tend to provide an impetus for political street art production as a contentious performance. In situations where excommunications are also conditioned by the wielding of arbitrary power and a high risk of penalty, it is reasonable to suggest that street art interventions may be more likely to tend towards infrapolitics.

However, it may also be possible to think about another kind of exclusion which can provide a stimulus for street art production. At certain historical junctures, moments of crisis and transition, communities, indeed entire societies may experience a gap or pause in comprehension brought on by the lack of adequate categories for describing and processing of the phenomenon at hand. Roland Bleiker (2010) discusses this kind of breach in human understanding as a part of his work on artistic responses to 9/11. The argument here is that acts such as painting and musical composition can perhaps enable us to express interior things, or affective intensities that we cannot yet verbalise.

b) What can the presence, style and concentration of politically committed street art tell observers about the socio-political context?

As Edelman (1995) rightly suggests, the settings that human beings occupy give them a visual cue to act in particular ways, they confer meanings and often provide some kind of guide through a milieu of information and possibilities. It may be argued for instance that conspicuous and familiar public buildings have historically helped to re-establish clarity and confidence in the social order. In a city or town, having as a central focal point a structure that has long housed legitimate authority can serve to quell disquiet in times of crisis by contributing to a sense of unity and security. Commonly such buildings are large and imposing. This monumentality re-enforces and legitimates the strength and will of the state. In Western Europe and its former colonies, it is not unusual to see replication of the Classical Greek and Roman architectural styles in governmental buildings. Obvious examples include the French and German parliament buildings. On the one hand, this may be seen as an attempt to emphasise some kind of lineage with powerful empires and polities of the past. On the other hand, adherence to the principles of harmony, balance, symmetry, and monumentality, common to classical architecture again contribute towards building a collective sense of constancy, order and equilibrium. By contrast, the intentionally disruptive aesthetic that characterises the medium of oppositional street art projects a clear message of disestablishmentarianism. Its very presence may serve as an incitement to action in that it sets a visible precedent for acts of refusal and noncooperation.

Indeed, it may possible to infer even more specific facts about times and places from the vehicle of street art. The content of street art interventions as well as their level of sophistication, concentration and authorship may indicate a great deal about the perceived socio-political context, prevailing opportunity matrix and attendant possibilities for

mobilisation. For example, the existence of highly sophisticated, time-consuming interventions may indicate a high level of societal and elite tolerance for the medium, exemplified by state sponsored muralism movements like those of Mexico in the 1920's and 30's. Pluralistically authored street art, emerging in high concentrations, may indicate public discontent with the quality of representative channels. Such was the case during the recent wave of uprisings that occurred across North Africa and the Middle East. Speedily produced street art modes such as graffiti and fly-posting may be a response to rapidly changing events or conditioned by fear of reprimand. Interventions that directly identify both target and author will almost certainly indicate a context in which the author does not fear reprisal for his/her actions or one in which the possible outcomes of the intervention are perceived to warrant any risk associated with attribution. This certainly became the case in Northern Ireland where murals by both sides openly targeted each other.

Based around these examples it seems reasonable to suggest that the presence, style and concentration of street art may indeed provide useful snapshots into public sentiments, the balance of threat and likelihood of mobilisation at given points in time. By piecing such snapshots together it may be possible to reconstruct something of 'a popular social history', following Chaffee (1993) and Tschabrun (2003). Afterall, "...in the unending process of social conflict and state formation, street art can be a tool for analysing and describing that process" (Chaffee 1993:4).

However, the recourse to street art (and indeed any other medium) as a historical source material or 'mirror' of social sentiment requires a certain degree of caution from scholars. Noting the tendency for social analyses to examine past events as though they constitute bounded wholes, distinct from the present, Williams (1977) challenges theorists to pay greater attention to social phenomena 'in process'; particularly to explore the idea that art and

literature are forever ‘in the making’. In other words, distinct formative processes occur in the minds and bodies of different social actors in different present moments. The upshot of this insight is that affective response and affect capture can occur around the same empirical matter limitlessly with different outcomes. Of course, this is no endorsement for the rejection of historical or empirical research, rather it is a caveat. Attending to this difficulty underscores the imperative to triangulate, critique, and incorporate the voices, experiences and insights of research subjects wherever possible.

c) In what ways can street art interventions feed back into the social milieu, altering or sustaining the possibilities for resistance?

As described earlier in this chapter, later elaborations of the framing approach have moved to incorporate the feedback effects of culture and the role of ‘performativity’. Yet the interactional and phenomenological advances made still fail to address important questions around aesthetic engagement in contentious politics. A suggestive premise of this project is that street art functions as a contentious performance by invoking and harnessing affect in spectators and producers; where affect describes the felt but initially unspecified intensities that provide the fuel for further action or inaction.

Arguments about affective experience can be hard to substantiate empirically, given the inevitable intangibility of a concept premised on its very antecedence to cognitive processing and labeling; its extra-textual and extra-discursive nature. Indeed, it can be said to almost require a kind of faith. Yet, Feigenbaum (2010) and Halsey and Young (2008) are amongst scholars who have convincingly argued alongside their empirical studies, that there is an important affective dimension to the act of graffiti writing that turns it into a heuristic and rehabilitative device. Based on Deleuze and Guattari’s notion that art serves as a mechanism for accessing some kind of immanent beyond that enables human beings to step outside of

themselves, the former argue that graffiti writing *does things to* (or ‘affects’) the graffiti writers’ bodies as much as it does things to the surfaces on which they write. Meanwhile, the latter explains how graphic acts of contestation on or around ‘globalised fences’ work as “...affective engagements through which people forge connections with others and with their surroundings, often confronting or re-imagining conceptions of themselves as political subjects in relation to the spaces around them” (Feigenbaum 2010:125). It is therefore possible to think about the ways in which street art paradoxically operates as “a *fissure* in representation” (O’Sullivan 2001:28), transforming, if only for brief periods, the self conceptions of artists and onlookers, as well as their understandings of what actions and reactions are possible. In other words, bringing these immanent possibilities to the fore.

The discussion above seeks to illustrate the ways in which an *affect-informed political process theory* can provide novel and lateral insights around the key questions guiding this project. In the three chapters that follow, these questions will be addressed more closely, firstly in relation to political street art production in Brazil and then in Bolivia and Argentina.

CHAPTER 3

“Tupinaquim o Tupinãodá?” Brazilian artist-activists in confrontation with power

Today, street art decorates every conceivable surface and space within Brazil’s sprawling urban zones, providing the contemporary flaneur with a visual feast and an exceptional array of commentaries on contemporary social life. As Lost Art, Manco and Neelon claim in the Preface to their 2005 photo-book “Graffiti Brasil”, the country “...boasts a unique and particularly rich graffiti scene, which in recent years has earned it an international reputation as the place to go for artistic inspiration”. Notably the production of street art, particularly forms of muralism and graffiti, accelerated at an unprecedented pace from the mid-1980’s, co-inciding roughly with the period of democratic transition, economic opening and the import of hip hop codes and practices. Popular discourse in Brazil tends to associate this period with the emergence of street art collectives or ‘crews’. However, as this chapter will explain, Brazil’s first documented street art collective in fact emerged around a decade earlier. Whilst the majority of artists who emerged in the late 1980’s and late 1990’s describe their work as decorative and largely apolitical, the artist-activist collective, *Tupinãodá* formed part of a crucial yet understudied ‘first generation’ of *graffiteiros* who used their art to intervene in a context marred by the circumscription of political rights and freedoms, repressive police practices and the inadequate, even arbitrary application of the rule of law. Street artists from this generation describe their work as manifestly political.

This chapter proceeds by charting the emergence, development and stylistic evolution of politically committed street art in Brazil, utilising Lyman Chaffee’s fieldwork and eyewitness accounts as a starting point. The focus then narrows to explore the use and utility of street art

as a mode of contention under the period of military rule from 1964 to the early 1980's. It discusses the emergence and practice of street art collective *Grupo Tupinãodá* in this period and follows the style and substance of their mediations through the protracted process of democratic transition. Drawing on interview data and photographic resources, the chapter explores the intentions, experiences and insights of three of the group's members, revealing the extent to which the process and products of their interventions have assisted in the re-disclosure and reframing of political possibilities.

3.1 Surfacing: street art as campaign tool

Thus far, the only serious and systematic attempt to document the evolution and range of political street art in Brazil has been Lyman Chaffee's comparative study, published in 1993. In this monograph, Chaffee noted several challenges to the study of Brazilian street art: the wide geographical spread of the country; the variation of cultural influences and informative aesthetic ideals as well as great disparities in levels of literacy and resource access. Each of these challenges re-presents itself today: the country's enormous size; the wide dispersion of the population across many large urban areas; and the entrenched socio-economic disparities that sustain north – south divisions and separate centre from periphery in urban zones all affect the external validity of sample material collected. As such, it is crucial to approach the each intervention in context, each evolution of style against political, economic and social circumstance. Like Chaffee's work, this study takes the inter-war period as its starting point. This is where the first documented and archived examples of political street art can be found. Beginning with the period of authoritarian rule under Getúlio Dornelles Vargas, street art was utilised by pro-system and anti-system political forces. Most visible at this time was the campaign poster, which became a choice mode for political parties seeking an instrument by which to communicate their claims, mobilise resources and to frame opponents. This section

first discusses the power of the campaign poster and emergence of pro-system graffiti before moving on to address the appropriation of the medium by the ‘excommunicated’.

As Tschabrun explains, political posters make up a distinct category, characterised, as they are, by a built-in obsolescence tied to their ephemerality:

Wheat-pasted on walls, transformed into placards and carried in picket lines, or tacked up in college dormitories, posters were never designed for permanency....The built-in obsolescence of political posters endows them with a quality not always shared by more permanent forms of primary source material, namely that the creators of posters rarely, if ever, thought they were creating historical evidence. As advertisements for political events (rallies, marches, demonstrations), political posters may sometimes attest to underreported or even illegal activities that may be documented in no other way (Tschabrun 2003:305).

In this sense, when incorporated as a historical source, posters can often provide a more candid insight into the circulating ideas, influential characters and noteworthy events emerging in a given political moment. In triangulation, they can provide multiple snapshots or perspectives of this moment, in this way supplementing, reconfiguring or altogether dismantling dominant historical narratives. Referring to the immediate utility and instrumental value of a printed campaign poster however, Tschabrun (2003:303) continues: “Brash and aggressive, raw and yet often poignant, political posters urge, instruct, encourage, and exhort...they share with banners, flyers, signs, and promotional materials of all kinds the purpose of communicating instantly, effectively, and powerfully”.

The *Aliança Liberal* (Liberal Alliance), which backed Getúlio Vargas in the 1930 elections, produced sophisticated multi-coloured posters, intended to entice and attract wide sectors of Brazil's expanding middle class as well as the *tenentes*, junior army officers who had grown

increasingly disgruntled by the patrimonial and oligarchal configuration of Brazilian politics.⁷ “Some posters contained extensive statements, others personalized the candidate through images, while others voiced issues of concern” (Chaffee 1993:132). In the most part, the posters replicated figurative colour illustrations through the lithographic technique, which had been mastered in Europe in the mid nineteenth century (Tschabrun 2003). One colourful *Aliança Liberal* poster, shown here, depicts three fatigue-clad figures on horseback, representative of the three states which comprised the support base for the *Aliança*: Minas Gerais, Rio Grande do Sul and Paraíba. Each of the figures wields a state flag. On the far right, the figure wields the state flag of Paraíba. The flag’s bold inscription “NÉGO”, translating as “I deny”, originates from the contrary position adopted by Paraíba’s state governor João Pessoa concerning the Presidential candidacy of *paulista*,⁸ Julio Prestes. Pessoa was assassinated in 1930 and the black of the flag symbolises the mourning of the *paraibanos*.⁹ Behind the figures is the impression of a rising sun, with brilliant red rays extending from the poster’s edges and leading the viewer’s line of vision toward a distant horizon. In Brazil, as in many other countries and cultures, the symbol of a rising sun on the horizon is popularly associated with ideas of hope and possibility for the new day.

Revolutionary groups in São Paulo also utilised the poster as a mobilising device during the 1932 Constitutionalist uprising against Vargas (Chaffee 1993). The Constitutionalist Revolution, sometimes also referred to as the Paulista War, emerged as a result of growing animosity towards the federal government from political factions within the state of São Paulo. Vargas’ 1930 *coup* had affected São Paulo by eroding the state autonomy that had

⁷ *Tenentismo* emerged as a political-military movement of young army officers in the 1920’s. *Tenentes* formed a youthful but well-trained wing of the military increasingly that became disenchanted by the politics of the *República Velha* (Old Republic) which were characterized by election rigging, machine politics as well as the ‘*café com leite*’ pattern of advantage that enabled the two largest states: São Paulo and Minas Gerais, to gain alternate hold over the national presidency. The young *tenentes* rebelled in 1922, asking for reforms in the power structure, universal suffrage, nationalizations and the institution of a secret ballot.

⁸ *Paulista* is the established demonym for a resident of São Paulo.

⁹ *Paraibano* is a demonym used to describe residents of the state of Paraíba in the North-East of Brazil.

been preserved by the 1891 Constitution. Vargas had then gone on to anger *paulistas* by preventing the inauguration of the governor of São Paulo Júlio Prestes, while simultaneously overthrowing President Washington Luis, who had served as state governor of São Paulo from 1920 to 1924. Following the coup, posters appeared in São Paulo projecting slogans including: “*em defesa da Constituição*” (in defense of the Constitution), attacking Vargas’ tendency towards autocracy (ibid.). Tensions worsened in May 1932 when four protesting students were killed by government troops. A movement called MMDC (invoking the initials of the surnames of each of the students: Martins; Miragaia; Dráusio and Camargo) emerged in São Paulo to pressure the provisional government headed by Vargas to abide by a new Constitution. Two months later social unrest escalated into a full uprising.

By 1932, MMDC posters leveraged rhetoric aimed at recruiting for and sustaining the *paulista* war effort. One poster read “*Abaixo a ditadura*” (Down with the dictatorship) and depicted in caricature a small figure resembling Vargas being squeezed in the grip of a giant *bandeirante*,¹⁰ with the flag of São Paulo state in the backdrop. This poster was evidently intended as a means of belittling Vargas publicly whilst emphasising the strength and resilience of São Paulo state, embodied in the figure of the *bandeirante*. Another poster read “*para o bem São Paulo*” (for the good of São Paulo) and depicted a woman’s hand in the frame donating a gold ring, presumably her wedding band (ibid.), as a financial contribution in aid of the popular ‘war’ against the powerful, incumbent Vargas. The message here seems to be one of sacrifice and loyalty to the state of São Paulo. In this instance, the poster demonstrably provides a means of generating monetary resources for the movement.

¹⁰ The *bandeirantes* (which translates roughly as ‘followers of the flag’), were members of the 16th-18th century South American explorations known as ‘*bandeiras*’. The original purpose of the *bandeiras* was to capture and force indigenous people into slavery, but later expeditions began to focus on the acquisition of mineral wealth. *Bandeirantes*, most of whom were Portuguese men from São Paulo, were responsible for expanding Portuguese territory from the Tordesilhas Line to roughly the area occupied by today’s Brazil.

Indeed, when “mined solely for the textual information they contain, posters occasionally disclose facts and details that are not recorded elsewhere”. However, when “...studied for the messages they communicate by the juxtaposition of words and images”, they open wide a window on the political and cultural constellations that have generated them (Tschabrun 2003:305-306). Posters can reveal details about a movement’s stylistic influences, its framing practices, as well as its ideological and financial recourses. In the examples shown here, the words alone would tell us comparatively little about the poster’s targets or underlying operations of power. Yet, when the images are invoked alongside the text, it is possible to gain an indicative glimpse into the highly gendered nature of the *paulista* campaigns, in their attempts to counter- frame Vargas and mobilise resources for movement survival. In Plate 2, physical stature is presented as a crucial indicator of male prowess and accordingly, ability to govern. The delicate female hand presented in Plate 3 reveals women as the key target of this poster. Here it is the women of São Paulo who are asked to contribute to the struggle, not as active revolutionaries but rather as passive financial backers; sacrificing their most prized possessions (their gold and matrimonial bands) for the sake of the state. It is clear that in these cases, the words alone would express only a fraction of that which is implied through the images invoked.

However, it must be further noted that the pairing of text and image can enrich, invigorate and indeed complicate the instrumental and extrinsic value of posters in other ways. On the one hand, it is possible to speak of the ways in which, “[t]he visual vocabulary of political posters is simultaneously rich and limited, with artists constantly recycling, reinterpreting, and transforming a large but restricted body of icons and images.” Tschabrun (2003:315). Posters may both feed into and transform cultural codes, their modes and practices of representation. Some of the symbols and images mobilised in posters are extremely persistent over time. Tschabrun (2003) points to the recycling of José Guadalupe Posada’s *calaveras*

(skeletons) in Chicano poster making and the global pervasiveness of Che Guevara as an icon of socialism in the latter part of the twentieth century. In the case of the posters from the Constitutionalist Revolution, it is possible to see how the visual components have been engineered to tap into and resonate with the existing practices of representation. In Plate 1, colors are familiar and associative, breaking dawns, flags and fatigue clad soldiers are all strongly ideological elements that bring nationalism and conflict into stark focus.

On the other hand, in order to be effective and adequately evocative, "...posters need to attack the viewer's emotions and at the same time have an immediate, cognitive impact" (Tschabrun 2003:315). This comment by Tschabrun (perhaps unintentionally) highlights the point made so strongly in Deborah Gould's recent work on affect as well as Raymond Williams' discussion of 'structures of feeling', some thirty years prior. At the extra-cognitive level, the viewer is viscerally stimulated in some way when s/he comes into contact with the visual rendering. This unleashes a potential for action or response which must be captured at the cognitive level, where the symbols, colours, forms and textual addendums must somehow be made to fit with the categories and comprehensions that exist prior; the memories and intersubjective understandings that form human cultural repertoires.

Tschabrun (2003:315) makes the argument that in "the best political posters, the text and graphics work together to express meaning as an intertwined, symbiotic whole. Some posters are so poorly conceived or designed that no overt message is communicated, but unlike fine art, this is rare". However, her position becomes an unwittingly normative and reductive one. In the first instance, the full match or capture of affect is unachievable and it is in its very uncodifiable nature that its potential to drive change and creativity is found. As will become clear in the discussion of *Grupo Tupinãodá* later in the chapter, not all protest movements seek to articulate these kind of symbiotic wholes through their street art interventions all of

the time. The medium may instead present itself as an outlet for unprocessed expressions; largely extra-cognitive or automated acts that still serve as incitements to creative practice and re-imagination. As such, Tschubrun's argument about what constitutes a 'good' example of a political poster is already normatively implicated with the sense that utility in politically committed art is tied to the effective and tightly bounded direction of thought. Here it is possible to glimpse the rationalist-cognitive bias in action.

Whilst political posters share a great deal with political wall-paintings in terms of their potential to evoke, communicate or complicate, as a mode which makes use of mechanised mass production they differ from hand-produced interventions in several significant ways. Firstly, the possibility and ease of mechanical reproduction means that larger spaces can be targeted and filled (by flyposting, for example) in a much shorter amount of time with posters than with painting. Posters also offer somewhat more flexibility in terms of their display possibilities, allowing for the circulation of photographs or even the reproduction of paintings.

Problematically however, poster production requires specialised equipment which is quite often cost prohibitive for large segments of the population. Commonly, those who require representation most can least afford it and as such, posters tend instead to become the mainstay of political elites, well-financed political parties and only the longer established and better funded social movements. Additionally, it should be noted that posters may or may not have the same potential to shock, impress upon and move spectators as sophisticated, large-scale or 'controversial' paintings do. There is an argument to be made here about the power of original creative productions; the force, even the 'aura' of street art interventions that are infused with the exertion, endeavour and commitment of a living, breathing artist or collective.



Plate 1: A campaign poster for the *Alianza Liberal*.



Plate 2: An anti-Vargas campaign poster.

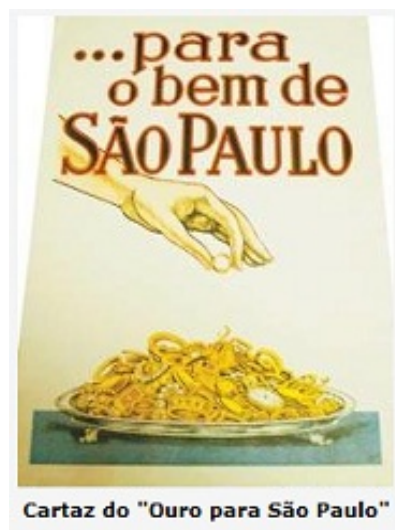


Plate 3: “For the Good of Sao Paulo”, a *paulista* campaign poster.

2.2 The push for plurality

Vargas' forces successfully suppressed the *paulistas* within a year and he continued to rule as a dictator for the next 15 years, enacting a new constitution in 1934 and subsequently circumventing the constitutional prohibition of his re-election in 1937 by creating a new politico-economic system called the *Estado Novo* (New State). The *Estado Novo* was modeled in the image of the Portuguese corporatist state of Antonio Salazar. Resultantly, the Vargas period was characterised by "...modernization, political centralization, industrialization and Brazilian participation in World War II in support of the allies" (Fleischer 2005: 472). By 1945 mounting societal disillusion with the regime led the government to relax their restrictions on political activity. First, censorship of the press was wound down and later came the announcement of congressional and presidential elections. This long-awaited democratic opening generated a great deal of new expressions through street art as various groups sought to project the possibility of political alternatives and communicate their frustrations through publicly accessible social commentary. Competing parties vied for electoral support using posters, handbills and illustrations on the pavements.

Emerging in support of Vargas were the *Partido Comunista Brasileiro* (Brazilian Communist Party or PCB), the labour movement and the *queremistas*.¹¹ The PCB emerged as the fourth largest political party during this period and according to Chaffee (1993), it became the most prolific producer of street art until it was outlawed in 1948. Initially the PCB published and disseminated posters reading "*Constitucionalismo com Getúlio*" (Constitutionalism with Getúlio), often accompanied by the image of a hammer and sickle. The hammer and sickle is

¹¹ The *queremistas* emerged in 1945 to provide a popular support base for Vargas who had declared himself 'father of the poor'. The *queremistas* sought to keep the incumbent in power and they were named for their slogan "*Nos Queremos Getúlio*" ("We want Getúlio"). Campante (2009) explains that in 1945, pro-Vargas *queremistas* promoted large-scale demonstrations in Rio de Janeiro, which were a huge force behind the conservative backlash that soon deposed Vargas.

perhaps the most well known icon of Communist association. It was conceived during the Bolshevik Revolution and is said to represent the unified force of the industrial proletariat and agricultural workers. Rather resourcefully, the party conceived of the idea to stencil the hammer and sickle onto pavements in urban areas. This provided the PCB a low-cost method of reaching the sight and minds of urban residents and workers. Chaffee (1993) notes that in São Paulo, paving slabs were also sometimes painted with the message, “*Portinari, senador legítimo do povo, PCB*” (Portinari, legitimate senator of the people-PCB). Making Portinari’s name the only one visible in amongst the urban footfall can be seen as a symbolic prop to the populist persona; projecting the idea that he was indeed ‘one of the people’.

Notably, student groups played a substantial role in the anti-Vargas coalition. They utilised a combination of public demonstrations and other street based interventions in calling for amnesty to be granted to political prisoners and for constitutionalism. In March 1945 a student demonstration in Recife was intercepted by police officers, leading to the death of the president of the Pernambuco Students Union. In response, students from across the country organised to declare a pro-amnesty week for political prisoners. Having reasonable access to printing resources, student groups favoured posters as a mobilising tool. Some posters presented the word, “*anistia*” (amnesty) accompanied by an image of an open prison door leading out to an idyllic landscape (ibid.). The call for amnesty related to the indefinite detention and alleged torture of left-wing activists. The image beyond the prison doors seems to express the hope for a future of peace and freedom; an idea that stood in stark contrast to the political and social reality.

At around the same time, the *Uniao Democratica Nacional* (National Democratic Union or UDN) began to utilise murals and posters in their campaign efforts on behalf of former *tenente*, General Eduardo Gomes. Gomes had been a key figure and one of only two

survivors from the ‘18 of the Copacabana Fort’, the first revolt undertaken against the politics of the Old State. The UDN sought to frame their candidate as a reliable and courageous leader by recalling his leadership during the tenente revolts. In this vein, the UDN commissioned the painting of a huge mural in Belo Horizonte, which showed Gomes with a book in his hand that read “Constitutions”. Chaffee (1993) notes that UDN posters read, “*Votar em Eduardo Gomes*” (Vote for Eduardo Gomes) and “*para as pessoas, para a república e pela pátria*” (For the people, for the republic and for the fatherland). Many of these posters inserted Gomes’ face into the public spaces, his old, watchful eyes observing the misdeeds of the incumbent. UDN Street slogans sought to counter-frame Vargas by recalling his wrongdoings to the populace. For instance, the slogan, “*Lembrar 1937*” (Remember 1937) instructed voters to recall the constitutional crisis of 1937, which Vargas was known to have manipulated in order to extend his rule.

Notably, Vargas and Gomes were both beaten in the polls by former Minister of War Eurico Gaspar Dutra. After receiving a large plurality in the elections, Dutra assumed the presidency in January 1946 and remained in office until 1951. During this time, a new constitution was enacted and the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (also known as the Rio Treaty) was drafted and signed by parties to the International Conference for the Maintenance of Peace and Security in Petropolis. A key provision of this treaty was that signatories would put up a united defense against any attack directed toward a state in the Western Hemisphere (see Hilton 1979). Following criticism from Soviet media outlets, Dutra cut diplomatic ties with the USSR in 1947. Months later he initiated a legislative action to expel all Communists from elected office, prompting left-wing indignation expressed in a burst of visual noise.

Vargas was reinstated by direct election in 1951, forming a coalition cabinet representing all of the major parties. However, inflation, high costs of living, and an increase in underground

Communist activity spurred increasing frustrations amongst the military. Following the accidental death of an air force officer during the attempted assassination of an editor of an anti-Vargas newspaper, rumours spread that Vargas would be deposed by military. On August 24, 1954, he committed suicide, "...becoming a martyr and symbol for his Brazilian Labour Party (PTB) of the struggle of the Brazilian workers against economic oppression" (Fleischer 2005:472).

During the democratic period 1945-1964, street art was used consistently as a campaign tool. As a range of new movements, parties and interest groups emerged, wall-painting became an increasingly popular communicative medium. Chaffee (1993) notes that the left wing became progressively more organised, although it remained quite diverse in terms of group composition. In particular, Marxist ideas gained a great deal of visibility through slogans and symbols sited in the large cities. Additionally, *ligas camponesas* (peasant leagues) formed in association with the (temporarily) legalised PCB,¹² began to employ graffiti to enhance their visibility in rural areas. Usefully, for these new actors, wall painted slogans were relatively inexpensive to produce, they could be made visible to large audiences if strategically placed and their presence on the street enabled their messages and signatures to penetrate the day to day customs and practices of the populace. As these groups acquired greater financial resources and wider support bases, their interventions grew in sophistication and frequency and mechanically reproduced media (posters, handbills and pamphlets) were eventually added to their repertoires.

Until this democratic interlude, the information flow via the medium of street art had been fairly one directional, with the political (thus, 'upper') classes largely dominating *a opinião da rua* (the opinion of the street'). In this sense, with only a handful of exceptions, street art

¹² The PCB was banned again in 1948, as Dutra clamped down on Communist activity.

modes had been at the service of those already wielding considerable power; political incumbents and well-established political parties. In terms of the perceived utility of the medium, some pertinent insight is provided by the observation that, in spite of the wealth and broad choice of campaigning tools at the disposal of the political elites, they still deemed the low technology mode of mass communication enabled and embodied in street art forms as necessary and useful to their ends. However, perhaps an even clearer testament to the utility of the medium is the turn to street art that occurred amongst the largely impoverished urban population at this time.

Armand Mattelart has invoked of the lexicon of ‘excommunication’ when speaking of those who lack access to the dominant modes and channels of communication. Speaking of the late twentieth century and beyond, he expresses that:

‘Excommunicated’ is today the status of three-quarters of the world population. The more the hindrances to free flow of goods and free circulation of its officiants collapse, the more big multimedia and multinational groups overbid their vocation to merge all humans into a global community and to triumph where the great religions failed; and the more electronic barriers, fortified zones, walls with watchtowers and barbed wire, paramilitary patrols with dogs, that is, a whole logistics aimed at controlling and holding back the flows of those left behind by the socio- techno-economic apartheid of the world integrated capitalism (Mattelart to Constantinou 2008:34).

Whilst the methods by which certain groups are now obstructed from meaningful participation have grown more technologically advanced and increasingly unassailable, excommunication is itself not a specifically ‘modern’ symptom or phenomenon. The urban poor in 1950’s Brazil faced a position of relative voicelessness and invisibility; stymied in their contributory efforts by a range of economic and social barriers. Interestingly, many

refused to be silenced; appropriating and improvising with available resources, those without significant finance or concrete ties to political parties began to turn to forms of ad-hoc wall-writing in order to express their opinions on candidates, parties and the political system in general.

In the mid 20th century, a growing urban population expressed their opinions through ‘wall writings’ –political messages written with tar. By the 1940’s and ‘50s, these political writings, known as *pichação*, were commonplace. They were often written in response to the slogans painted by the political parties across the streets. (Manco et al 2005:13)

Early *pixação* (or *pichação*),¹³ which comes from *piche*, the Portuguese word for tar, consisted in the most part of phrases and interjections scrawled hastily on walls, doors or windows in the growing urban centres of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. By the 1950’s, *pichação*, had become the key medium for the poor and dispossessed, with the city walls providing perhaps the very first accessible platform for marginal groups to communicate their social and economic concerns to the politicians and broader populace in an unmediated fashion.

For a time, these localised civilian interventions served to neutralise the power of the political propaganda and pluralise *a opinião da rua* (the opinion on the street). However, during the early 1960’s, “pro-military groups also took their campaigns to the city walls” (Chaffee 1993:133). These groups employed painted slogans, seeking to capitalise on the grass-roots aura of ‘piche’ and filch the new urban visuality for their own ends. Military campaign activities increased in response to João Belchoir Marques Goulart’s appointment as president in 1961. Goulart had assumed the office of president following the sudden resignation of

¹³ Note that the *pixação* of the 1950’s differed from the contemporary subcultural manifestations of the same name. Contemporary *pixação* emerged in the late 1980’s, in parallel with the import of hip hop codes and practices from the US. It is characterized by cryptic stylized tagging, usually done with aerosol paint. Today’s *pixadores* are usually constituencies of the young and disenfranchised who like to demonstrate their courage and skill by tagging spaces at great height.

right-wing leader Jânio Quadros. However, well known for his moderate left-wing views, Goulart was distrusted by the military and the more conservative sectors of society, who maintained that his sympathies with Fidel Castro's Communist regime made him a threat to the stability of the Brazilian state. Negotiations between Goulart and the military establishment resulted in an agreement whereby a parliamentary system would be instituted to curb Goulart's powers. By 1963 however, Goulart had managed to undo many of the illiberal measures introduced by his predecessor, reinstating a presidential system of government and issuing a series of decrees setting low-rent controls, redistributing land and nationalising oil refineries and limiting repatriation of profits by multinational companies.

Pro-military groups became increasingly disgruntled and the names of faction leaders began to appear on the streets, liberally and frequently scrawled in a way that reflected "...an increasingly restless military. They were testing the political waters, jockeying among themselves, advancing one faction and leader over another, and heightening their profile to test public sentiments" (Chaffee 1993:133). The period of mounting pluralism at the street level was brought to an abrupt halt in 1964 as Goulart was overthrown by the military, ushering in over two decades of authoritarian rule.

3.3 Os anos de chumbo and the retreat from the street

The 21-year period, sometimes labelled '*os anos de chumbo*' (the years of lead) was characterised by varying levels of censorship, human rights abuses and arbitrary implementation of the rule of law. Beginning in 1964, General Humberto Castelo Branco, pressed by influential military hardliners, implemented a series of supra-constitutional measures; *Ato Institucionais* (Institutional Acts or AIs), as means to entrench military control. The implementation of AI-1 enabled any politician who was perceived to pose a viable threat to the regime to be removed from office. AI-2 abolished the multi-party system, legalising

only two parties in a farcical performance of democratic governance: the government-backed *Aliança Renovadora Nacional* (National Renewal Alliance or ARENA) and a new, *Movimento Democrático Brasileiro* (Democratic Movement of Brazil or MDB), which served initially as an umbrella organisation for the broad range of liberals, leftists, moderates and conservatives who had been drawn together from outlawed parties and had managed to retain their jobs by distancing themselves from the more critical leftist political currents and characters (Koonings and Kruijt 1999). From 1965 onward, the president, governors and some mayors were elected indirectly through the Congress, which in practice was controlled by the regime.

For a short time under Branco's successor, Marshal Artur da Costa e Silva, non-violent protests were tolerated. Marches and demonstrations succeeded in uniting quite diverse sectors of society, all opposed to the military government, its ideology and practices. Politicians from the legal and illegal opposition attempted to consolidate an anti-authoritarian alliance, by the name of the *Frente Ampla* (Broad Front). Realising that there was little possibility of ousting the military through direct or violent forms of confrontation, Frente Ampla framed their objectives in terms of *re-thinking* the relationship between the military and civil society. They began producing and disseminating their articles and manifestos via the '*Tribuna da Imprensa*' newspaper before being outlawed on April 5, 1968. Later in the year, the *Passeata dos Cem Mil* (March of the One Hundred Thousand) took place in Rio de Janeiro, spurred by the death of student Edson Luís at the hands of the police. The shock of Luis' death brought together the student movement and elements of the old left as well as the middle class and the Catholic Church, both of whom had initially thrown their support behind the military's drive for a more ordered society. The march was led by a single large banner with the hand-painted slogan "*Abaixa a ditadura- Povo no poder*" (Down with the Dictatorship. The people in power) and lasted for three hours, without being dispersed by the

police. However, concerned by the year's eruptions and unrest, in December 1968 the regime shut down parliament and Costa implemented AI-5, which increased censorship; requiring that all media content be reviewed by government agents prior to publication. In the same breath, however it removed key political rights, enabling political prisoners to be subjected to military law without habeas corpus (Koonings and Kruijt 1999). In most areas of civil and political governance, Costa assumed unlimited powers.

The implementation of the fifth act was followed by a series of political purges, during which time, many artists, academics and politicians were arrested, tortured and/or forced into exile. Targets included members of the emergent *Tropicalia* movement (or *Tropicalismo*),¹⁴ which had been producing politically engaged music and performances since the coup in 1964. The brutal repression of workers' strikes at Osasco and Contagem in 1968, effectively silenced the labour movement for several years to follow (Mainwaring 1986). Producers of oppositional ephemera and street art interventions were driven underground. The political conditions greatly affected the kind of street art being utilised by members of the public. Over the 21 years of military rule, graffiti became the most popular form for dissenters because it was quick and cheap to produce, lessening the chances of being captured by the authorities. Slogans including: "*Abaixa a ditadura*" (Down with the dictatorship); "*não à ditadura*" (No to dictatorship); "*não mais tortura*" (No more torture); "*militar fora*" (Military out) were selectively placed around urban zones, usually under the cover of darkness to preserve the anonymity and physical security of the producers. As artist and former dissident-painter Rui Amaral explains in a 2011 interview, the conditions for oppositional graffiti production were dangerous and the objective was to post your message or symbol without being seen

¹⁴ See Dunn (2001) for more information on *Tropicalismo* and subversion of the dictatorship through music, dance and performance.

and without getting caught. Anti-system interventions in large part tended towards infrapolitics as artist-activists sought to circumvent repressive power (Amaral 2011).

Importantly, as Chaffee (1993:134) points out, “[s]treet art discourse was not always anti-system” over the dictatorship period. The pseudo-democratic system engineered by the military regime featured regular elections where the two sanctioned parties could compete for votes. These elections tended to generate a broad range of street art as the ARENA and MDB vied for support with devices ranging from sophisticated lithograph posters, to casually painted slogans and symbols. The latter, in particular, were employed on the streets to transmit a visuality compatible with government projections of an active and democratically engaged civil society. Yet, in practice there were strict limits placed upon the political expressions of these actors. Other pro-system interventions sought to promote the regime’s ideology of developmental nationalism. During the period 1969-1975, the Brazilian economy experienced a period of exceptional growth, dubbed by many observers as an “economic miracle”. This period of growth coincided with the country’s World Cup victory in 1970. Capitalising on these successes as an opportunity to bolster national unity and pride, the Medici government published and distributed posters linking sporting success to governmental prowess and national progress towards industrial development. In one of these posters, the footballer Pele was featured scoring a goal, alongside this image the following slogan: “Nobody can stop this country now”.¹⁵

During this period Brazil also experienced an increase in levels of poverty and social inequality. Promoting growth through industrialisation, the Medici regime funded several large-scale infrastructural projects but neglected calls for greater social justice. Additionally,

¹⁵ During the 1970’s the military regime routinely sought to use the popularity of football to its own ends by promoting and linking world cup success to the national pride. The government directly intervened in the internal organisation of the sport, attempting to institute a regimental discipline in the Seleccion and swapping skilled players for those more politically acceptable (See Levine 1980 and Flynn 1973).

it resolved to sponsor the invasion and decimation of indigenous lands for the purposes of agricultural cultivation. The era of the ‘economic miracle’ doubled as the ‘*era dos desaparecidos*’ (era of the disappeared), as hundreds of political dissidents, tribal peoples and others with supposedly leftist or anti-governmental affiliations were removed from society, tortured and killed by order of dominant military hardliners (Amaral 2011). Between 1964-85, the military was responsible for over 400 documented deaths and tortured or exiled thousands more. Records have come to show that the highest number of human rights violations occurred during Medici’s period in office.

3.4 Colouring the streets: the emergence of *Tupinãodá*

The Geisel period, which lasted from 1974 to 1979, saw an easing of repressive military actions and brought with it, the very first steps in a long and protracted process of re-democratisation (Encarnación 2003). These democratising steps were to come in fits and starts, causing moments and resurgences of hope, creativity disappointment and disenchantment amongst the broader populace. Many of these moments and experiences were captured in the work of São Paulo’s first documented street art collective, *Grupo Tupinãodá*. In 1982, artist-activists Milton Sogabe, Eduardo Duar and Zé Carratu began re-appropriating public spaces in São Paulo with their collective artistic efforts. They were later joined by César Teixeira, Jaime Prades, Rui Amaral and Carlos Delfino. During the latter years of the dictatorship and throughout the protracted transitional period, *Grupo Tupinãodá* utilised street art: outdoor installation; mega-graffiti; stencil; mural and public performance, to cast a critical commentary on the political class. As the following sections will explain, the collective used their work to deconstruct government projections around the idea of Brazilian identity, seeking to demonstrate, induce and mobilise confrontational attitudes in society. Whilst not directly or consistently anti-thetical, their work facilitated in the reflective

disclosure of meaningful alternatives to the current state of affairs, in particular by recuperating the power of creative thought for re-appropriation by the masses.

Mainwaring (1986:1) explains that from 1974, President Ernesto Geisel and Chief of Cabinet Bolbery de Couto e Silva made public their intention to promote a “slow, gradual and careful process of political liberalization”. Whilst this was not the first such commitment espoused by governing figures (indeed, Branco, Costa e Silva and even Medici had all made similar claims), it was only during this phase that decisive steps towards an *abertura* (political opening) were in fact enacted. Under increasing pressure from an opposition who had in the 1974 elections, defeated the ARENA party in some of the larger states, Geisel abolished AI-5 with its restrictions on the media, disassembled the artificially imposed two-party system and initiated a process of political amnesty to be followed through by the succeeding president, João Baptista de Oliveira Figueiredo.

Between 1977 and 1980, after years of near-dormancy, liberalising measures inspired a brief resurgence of union activity as well as peasant and local/community movements. Yet, according Chaffee (1993) who draws upon surveys carried out by the *Centro Brasileiro de Análise e Planejamento* (Brazilian Centre for Analysis and Planning or CEBRAP) in 1982, few emergent political entities in São Paulo saw much utility in street art as a mobilising device. Caldeira (1986) cited by Chaffee (1993) explains that the PTB deemed street art worthless and instead focused their efforts on verbal communication. Standing out in this regard was the newly formed *Partido Trabalhadores* (Workers’ Party or PT) who employed individuals like Rui Amaral to paint the walls of São Paulo and its peripheries with pro-PT slogans and other identification. Amaral (2011b) recalls a particular PT intervention, which he remembers as having been particularly effective. He explains that around 1981, he and other party supporters began to stencil white stars in the centres of crossroads around São

Paulo.¹⁶ Amaral explains that he and his colleagues took great pleasure in situating the star at street corners and intersections, because it “symbolised the new and important choices that Brazilians now needed to face” (Amaral 2011).

Mainwaring (1986) notes that the regime responded to the new political incursions with varying degrees of tolerance. Acutely aware of the need to foster and maintain public support in the face of new challenges, the regime introduced a more progressive wage policy in 1979. It also developed clientelistic networks of support, by diverting resources to a new set of housing projects in poor locales. Notably however, repression mounted against the peasant movements around the Amazon basin as well as the annual, heavily publicised auto workers’ strikes in the greater São Paulo. Despite civilian hopes for a speedy catharsis, political openings were calculated and controlled so as to ensure that a measure of influence was retained by the military. As Mainwaring (1986) explains, there was an intention to use the party system reforms of 1979 in such a way as to maximise ARENA’s chances of victory and thus greater legitimisation in the 1982 elections. The strategy of the military masterminds was to split the opposition into several parties, anticipating either fragmentation, or the emergence of a large and somewhat acquiescent centrist party. This plan backfired as viable and strong centrist and leftist parties emerged in the PT and PDMB respectively. In reaction, in 1981, the military government once again manipulated the system in its favour, instituting a law to prevent the new parties from forming alliances in the run up to the elections. By 1982, participation in urban popular movements was once again in decline, “...a result of the economic crisis, the attention commanded by the political parties and the government’s ability to marginalise these movements. In many rural areas, especially frontier regions, private and public repression remained rampant” (ibid.:11). It was in this context that *Grupo Tupinãodá* emerged.

¹⁶ The white star is the official PT logo, adopted from the Brazilian flag, which features twenty-seven white stars, corresponding to the twenty-seven Federal Districts.

Tupinãodá's participants had grown up during the dictatorship era. Accordingly, their opportunities, associations and practices had been limited by the de facto imposition of the Institutional Acts; their fear and resent of the military institution compounded by the atrocities committed during the Medici period. Some of *Tupinãodá*'s members had received a formal art education, others were self-taught and had come to practice art through more informal channels. All members had been drawn into the political opposition in some degree by the late 1970's. As noted above, Rui Amaral began his street art interventions in the PT brigades. Ze Carratu, describes himself as the son of Italian anarchists and a student of the *Passeata dos Cem Mil* and the French May. Carratu began working in the street in 1978 with improvised theatre and environmental installations. Having moved to Brazil with his family at the age of 10, Jaime Prades became absorbed into organised the Brazilian opposition in his late adolescence when he began producing political cartoons and pamphlets for left-wing activists at the publishing house '*Editora Abril*'. As he claims, "It was the time of the military regime, and in our generation you could not remain neutral. Our generation was militant, we took that to heart.... And this manifested in the mobilisation of *Tupinãodá*" (Prades 2011a).

Writing on the origins and practice of the *Tupinãodá* collective, curator Fabio Magalhães explains that, in order to stay ahead of the police, the street artists, when working alone, had to develop quick techniques to relay their images and concepts, such as stencilling or stamping. In 1983, Milton Sogabe was producing figurative stencils in and around the neighborhood of Pinheiros. Ze Carratu took to producing hasty chalk drawings on blacked out surfaces, a technique he would later bring to combine with others in the collective works of *Tupinãodá*. Prior to meeting Carratu and the other members of *Tupinãodá*, Rui Amaral set about plastering the streets of Vila Madelena with tiny black stick figures, quickly transferable and furtively produced. For Amaral, these figures formed part of an invented

utopia, a new world that would start its social relations afresh, dispensing with the violence, fear and inequality that marked the time (Amaral 2011).

In certain regards, these early works can be described in terms of their reflective disclosure or lull towards cognitive liberation. The term ‘reflective disclosure’ or ‘re-disclosure’ is adapted from Heidegger by Kompridis (2006) to describe the function of social and cultural practices in re-revealing the world; it’s background structures and relations of power, such that receivers might perceive the possibility of alternative orders. Carratu’s chalked images, threatened by the elements from the very moment of production, sought to impress on the viewer a sense of ephemerality and the constant possibility of dissolution that carry through to lived experience. They served as a visual reminder that nothing is fixed permanently, including the present concentrations and constellations of societal power (Amaral 2011).

Similarly, registering at a cognitive level, Amaral’s figurative interventions gave viewers a visual rendering of just such an alternative socio-political order. His figures populated the streets in their hundreds, free from molestation and harassment by the authorities. They danced and gesticulated energetically, literally making visible an alternative, liberated mode of being to which the populace might aspire. Aspects in the medium, form and appearance of street art may therefore be seen to assist in the generation of new understandings about the possibilities for dismantling existing relations of power for audiences. Notably, the level of sophistication, concentration and authorship (for instance, whether or not the activist is willing to self-attribute) can also indicate a great deal to the engaged citizen and/or social scientist. *Tupinãodá’s* early graffiti interventions were anonymous, stealthily produced and speedily placed. These features reflect the constraints and limitations posed by a repressive political apparatus, where the risk of discovery invokes fear and resultant subversion. Indeed, when interviewed in 2011, Amaral suggested that to self-attribute or sign the works at this

juncture would have been to invite brutality from the *Departamento de Ordem Política e Social* (Department of Social and Political Order or DOPS)¹⁷ (Amaral 2011). Quite importantly however, the mere presence of graffiti, a medium transgressive by nature, served as a clear signal to both authorities and civilians that a noncompliant fringe endured, activating (respectively) fears of and hopes for the emergence of entities and organisations that might challenge the status quo. A good measure of street art's impact or effect is the response of its targets. Amaral explains that his work was frequently white-washed over by the authorities who sought to preserve these spaces for their own projections (Amaral 2011).

These early interventions point to street art's potential to visually recast environments in ways that elide or deconstruct existing notions of order. Using McLuhan's terminology, Carratu and Amaral's interventions and their attendant redisclosures served to construct anti-environments that in turn opened up new opportunities for resistance. Importantly however, there is also a heavily affective component here, accessible and indicated only through Amaral's own reflective commentary. He explains that whilst he recognises that his figures were important as an instrumental claim to the outside spaces, they were also important at a more personal level: "...producing the figures gave to me some kind of release, they were freedom, presence... Art is determined by something more than what goes on in your head. It is also your heart, you know?" (Amaral 2011).

¹⁷ The Department of Political and Social Order (DOPS) was an official police branch responsible for locating opposition members. DOPS officers are heavily implicated in stories of political repression, torture and killing during the military era.

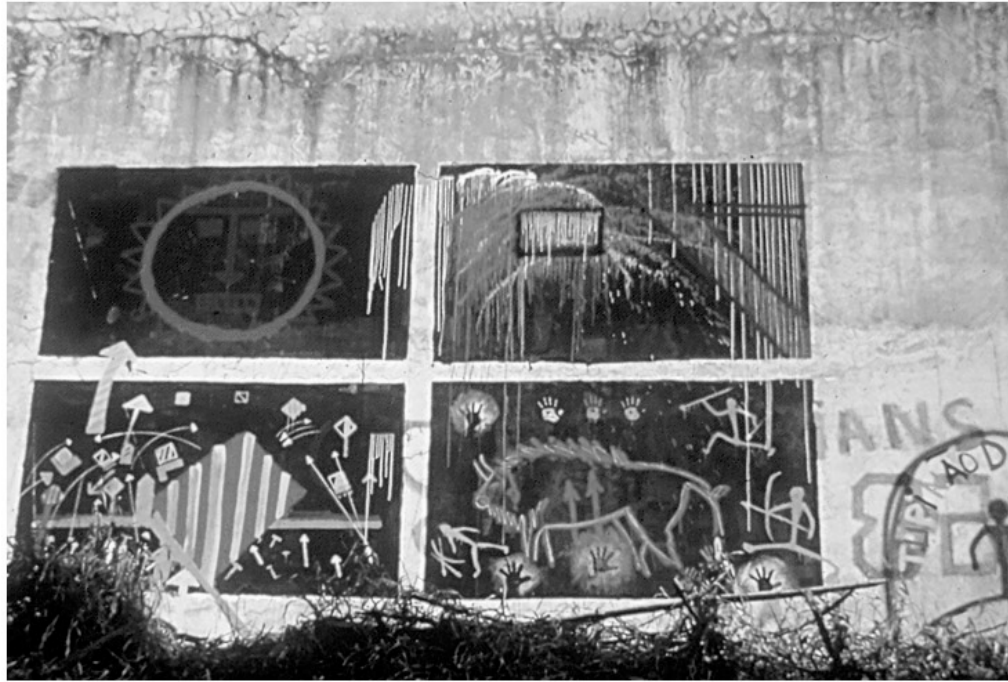


Plate 4: Chalked graffiti deployed by Ze Carratu and Milton Sogabe in 1983. Hunter-gatherers are a prevalent theme here as the group developed a keen interest in Brazilian history and the tribal customs and cultures that pre-dated colonialism.



Plate 5: An early stencil (with chalk surround) deployed by Milton Sogabe in 1983. The stencil features a hunter with his prize.

3.5 Collective interventions: from cannibalism to political critique

In 1983 another of *Tupinãodá's* members, Jaime Prades, began his street productions with “uma negra”, which transposed the work of the popular Brazilian Modernist Tarsila do Amaral into stencil form. Around the 1920's, Tarsila do Amaral and her modernist contemporaries in the *Grupo dos Cinco* (Group of Five) had conceived a style of painting that intentionally departed from European aesthetic ideals, carving out a new space for Brazilian identity and culture within the art world. As a result, her work, ‘*Uma Negra*’ (A Negress) had been regarded as one of the most representative and popular pieces of Brazilian art. Speaking of his decision to turn the celebrated image into a stencil, ‘*uma negra*’, Prades explains:

... the goal of my own work was to bring to the streets this highly regarded painting; to dislocate it from the institutions of high art and make it truly accessible to the mass audience by bringing it to the street. I suppose that in a way it was like a type of ‘pop art’...Speedy reproduction was key to dispersing the image in large numbers, to make it visible. Speed was important too because you did not want to attract attention from the authorities (Prades 2011b).

Further to this, he indicated that identity, access and memory were key motifs for the group members, the collective wanted to work in ways that encouraged Brazilians to critically engage with the idea of a Brazilian identity. Like the *Tropicalismo* movement before them, *Grupo Tupinãodá* were heavily influenced by the work of modernist poet Oswald de Andrade. In particular, his ‘*Manifesto Antropófago*’ (Cannibal Manifesto), which sought to play with the old colonial notion that Brazil was a land inhabited by cannibals. In the 1920's, de Andrade encouraged his fellow Brazilians to think about the possibilities of a cultural rather than a physical cannibalism, suggesting that Brazilians embrace (or ingest), and transform the received morsels of European culture, in ways that would engender and elaborate a uniquely Brazilian way of life.



Plate 6: ‘*uma negra*’, a stencil intervention appropriating Tarsila do Amaral’s “*Uma Negra*”. Designed and disseminated by Jaime Prades, in 1983.

Ze Carratu understands this process of cannibalism to have unfolded in dual modes in the city of São Paulo. Firstly he discusses the means by which he has personally developed as an artist by ingesting ideas and techniques from the European masters; transforming and transposing them into new domains of cultural practice. However, he also makes reference to a darker side of Brazilian cultural cannibalism, the damaging speculative practices encouraged by the regime, relentless and unsustainable rent-seeking endeavours that seemed only to reproduce the pillage and misappropriation committed centuries before by Portuguese colonialists.

I eat the culture that was given to me. I was born with the ability to have culture, to learn things and understand society. So I swallow these things that I learn. ... The Portuguese were good to eat! ... São Paulo is a city with a big speculation problem. Real estate speculation in this city devalues one space and raises the value of another, which they understand how to manipulate very well (Carratu to Carlsson and Manning 1989).

Effectively, for the members of the collective, the latter contributed to the range of social ills that needed to be confronted and resisted by broad sectors of the populace. The group's dissident, activist nature was reflected in their choice of name which was taken from a playful reference to de Andrade's work in a poem by the geographer Antonio Robert de Moraes: "*Você é tupi daqui ou tupi de lá, e tupiniquim ou tupinãoda?*" (Are you Tupi from here? Or Tupi from there? Are you *Tupiniquim*, or *Tupinãodá*?) (Prades 2011a). "*Tupiniquim*" was the language and name of the indigenous inhabitants of Brazil who made up the majority of the population when European colonisers arrived on the continent. In modern-day Brazil, the term is often used as a perjorative term for 'Brazilian national'. "*Tupinãodá*", is a word play based around the idea of a refusal to comply, sounding like "*Tupi does not*" in Portuguese.

This ethic of noncompliance guided the group's work. As Magalhães points out, "[c]reating street art imposed to the artists a somehow clandestine attitude; execution needed to be stealthy to avoid arrest, to stay away from the police". The decision to move from loose association to working increasingly as a group was thus born from strategy and practicality. In order to produce larger, bolder and more sophisticated pieces of work, Carratu, Sogabe and Duar decided to form a crew or collective, such that the street artists could take turns to work and keep watch for the authorities. Magalhães (2009:21) usefully highlights that "...this imposed a new dynamic to the implementation of their projects", allowing them greater freedom to experiment on-site and undertake ever bigger, more elaborate and innovative works outdoors.

During the latter years of the dictatorship the group resolved to create several outdoor installations based around the dual themes of waste and Brazilian nationalism. In 1984, the group created a large-scale intervention in the gardens around the Architecture and Urbanism School at the State University. For this piece of work the group accumulated a huge collection of black, yellow and blue garbage bags, which they fashioned to replicate the design of '*A Bandeira*', the Brazilian flag. This intervention provided a stark cognitive cue to viewers. Associating Brazil with that which is thrown away, discarded and devalued was inflammatory but the intervention was, at the same time, somewhat ambiguous. The action did not directly identify or frame its target, leaving viewers with a variety of possible questions to muse over: *In what ways has Brazil become devalued?; who or what elements in Brazil does this garbage represent?; what is my role in a Brazil composed of garbage?*. When asked to expand on the motivations for this work during the transitional period of the mid 1980's Prades made the exclamation, "The planet is not a garbage can, but it's wealth is garbage" (Prades 2011b).



Plate 7: The intervention *A Bandeira* (1984/5) by *Grupo Tupinãodá* featured salvaged garbage bags of yellow, blue and black. Arranged in a particular constellation on the USP lawns, the bags resembled the Brazilian national flag.

Prades chose not to expand on the meaning or target of '*A Bandeira*' with greater clarity, until nearly two decades later. However, in 2011 he confirmed that the group had been motivated by their anger towards the dictatorship. In his words, they sought to create a piece of work that criticised contemporary Brazil and particularly the imaginary of the country that had been forged by the regime. He explained that:

The dictatorship had appropriated the colours of the flag in a negative manner; in the ways it used football as a political tool, in its encouragement of damaging commercial practices and in its repressive measures against the Brazilian people themselves.... We felt a need to express ourselves, express our frustrations. We as Brazilians wanted to bring alive elements from our imaginations, not the codes handed down to us by those in power. We wanted to give new interpretations to objects and symbols that people see everyday. (Prades 2011b)

He also rather reservedly noted that at the time there was a limit to what they could get away with without being targeted by the authorities. The intervention had been one attempt to test and work within the supposed spirit of change, to let their creative juices flow publicly and visibly.

The deliberate ambiguity over the target and meaning of '*A Bandeira*' in the early stages, as well as the practice of non-attribution seen in the earlier solo works of *Tupinãodá* members can be understood as the products of measured caution. In this way they can be related to Scott's concept of infrapolitics, which describes the ways in which acts of insubordination are disguised or veiled to avoid retaliation under systems of domination. The pre-fix 'infra' underscores the structural or founding role of the described actions, emphasising that it is the very possibility of being able to develop collective critical understandings and dissenting behaviours out of the view of the authorities that enables resistance movements to germinate (Scott 1992). It is of course impossible to quantify just how much direct influence

Tupinãodá's disruptive efforts had over other *paulistas* during the dictatorship period. Nonetheless, it is certainly true that in realising and exploring the group's street art practices, as infrapolitics, it is possible to gain a retrospective insight into some of the alternative discourses, pressures and drivers of change in authoritarian-era Brazil.

3.6 Mounting articulations: civilian government and its discontents

By the end of 1984, the government party had splintered and a strong opposition coalition had formed around the idea of direct presidential elections. A three month long campaign was initiated by the PT along with the *Partido del Movimiento Democrático Brasileño* (Democratic Movement Party or PMBD), *Partido Democrático Trabalhista* (Democratic Workers' Party or PDT), *Partido Comunista Brasileiro* (Brazilian Communist Party or PCB) and the *Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira* (Brazilian Social Democratic Party or PSDB) to oppose the military's plan to maintain an indirect system and pressure Congress into supporting a constitutional amendment allowing for direct elections. In 1984, several million people participated in protests across Brazil and the slogan "*Diretas já*" (direct elections now) appeared on city walls, pavements and roadside embankments (Chaffee 1993). The movement for direct elections took up yellow as its official colour; re-appropriating the symbol for Brazilian wealth embodied in the Brazilian flag.

Whilst no amendment initially resulted, the campaign had something of a transformative impact on society: "It awakened the electorate, realigned political forces, split pro-government forces in Congress..." and led to the victory of Brazil's first civilian president for 21 years. (Chaffee 1993:139). In spite of a vicious poster campaign sponsored by the military to discredit civilian candidate Tancredo Neves, the transition was formally completed with his success in the 1985 elections. Neves took the Presidency in a peaceful handover of power, a move that was widely applauded by civilians, some of whom took to the streets to celebrate.

However, before he was inaugurated by ceremony, the president fell ill and died of a heart attack, leaving vice-president Jose Sarney, to gain the office by default.

Sarney instituted some liberalising measures with immediacy, legalising all political parties, restoring the constitutional promise of direct presidential and mayoral election and enfranchising illiterates. (Skidmore 1988). However, after 1985, democracy remained tarnished by the persisting presence of military personalities within the new administration, which was not the product of the people's vote but of a democratically elected yet partial constituent assembly (Encarnación 2003). Skidmore (1988) estimates that retired officers occupied an estimated 8,000-10,000 top posts in the 'new' government and the state enterprises. "...and, there was still the lavishly funded SNI,¹⁸ operating in the shadows and heavily staffed with military officers" (ibid.:273). Key authoritarian measures were left in place, such as the Press Law, the National Security Law, and Decree No. 1077 which banned the transmission of unapproved live broadcasts and publications (Green and Karolides 2009). Additionally, the emergence of unprincipled, fraudulent politicians prompted popular disenchantment with the political class and a withdrawal of support from the main parties (Skidmore 1988). Faced with these undemocratic continuities, public hopes for accountability and proper implementation of the rule of law faded.

Demands for Sarney to step aside began to decorate the streets around São Paulo and disenchanted *paulistas* continued to mobilise around the demand for "*Diretas já*". The PT produced posters demanding "*Sarney afuera*" (Sarney out) and other documented slogans included "*indiretos eleições-nunca mais*" (indirect elections- never again); "*Morte a Sarney: bandido e traidor*" (Death to Sarney- crook and traitor) and "*Sarney é um vigarista*" (Sarney's a crook) (Chaffee 1993). After Sarney's inauguration, *Grupo Tupinãodá* continued

¹⁸ The *Serviço Nacional de Informações* (National Information Service or SNI) was the Brazilian intelligence agency established under the Castelo Branco government. Originally a civilian organization, it came under the leadership of military hardliners and emerged as a leading force in the hunt for communists.

with their own urban interventions with greater fervor, enabled in a somewhat paradoxical fashion by the changed context. On the one hand, their efforts embodied a counter-reaction. On the other hand, their practice was facilitated by the *abertura*, as the reinstatement of freedoms of association and increased international scrutiny shifted the stakes and possible consequences for the production of activist art.

However, whilst many of *Tupinãodá*'s earlier interventions followed a strategic and ideological line that deliberately sought to counter the problem of intentionality, things changed in the wake of the formal democratic transition. Moved by the slow developments towards transparency and the lack of viable representative cultural and political institutions, *Tupinãodá* began to produce large-scale works of graffiti in far greater frequency, taking on much more ambitious projects and working increasingly in broad daylight with a lesser regard for the authorities. Jaime Prades explains that "What I think is that when the pressure cooker started to open, paint gushed out!" (Prades 2009). "It was like an automated response" (Prades 2011a). Having had their hopes for any immediate and substantive political change dashed, he compares the groups' feelings to a volcanic eruption or wave of indignation that took on a material form through their artistic interventions. Brian Massumi (2010) writes that, "Bodies move as they feel and then find themselves moving". Whilst "Graffiti was never the motivation" (ibid.) in and of itself, the *Tupinãodá* artist-activists found themselves moving through street art; moving to expel the energy of their quashed expectations. Prades compares the groups' feelings to a volcanic eruption or wave of indignation that took on a material form through their art (Prades 2011a).

Whilst there was no immediate formative logic or rule for the new interventions, *Grupo Tupinãodá* gradually became more acutely aware of their audience as well as the kinds of spaces that they were drawn to work in/on. The collective started using latex paint and rollers

with greater frequency because it enabled them to make much larger and brighter works, which would, they believed, make a much greater impression on viewers (Prades 2011a). Their works became increasingly playful in terms of the imaginary, invoking bold patterns and innovative, sometimes abstract themes to adorn abandoned buildings, alleyways and demolition zones. Reflecting on the change of course, Prades explains:

We regard our collective work as a kind of “strategic poetry” I suppose we had the collective aim to create ‘strange situations’, turning our street art into a disruptive force. Our art evolved and we would think about the functions and dynamics of the city, its velocity, its inhabitants and the relationship between the people and the public spaces (Prades 2011a).

Quite importantly, this association between *paulistas* and their urban surround had been molded by years of authoritarian government. The military regime’s attempts to project its own aesthetic ideals onto the public space, coupled with its practices of censorship, resulted in enterprises devoid of community or public engagement. In the 1970’s several initiatives were enacted with the rhetorical aim of creating spaces for recreation and cultural learning. Yet, it was common knowledge that in practice all thought and expression that deviated ideologically or philosophically from those in power would be curtailed or restricted. Additionally, since the 1960’s, the regime’s developmental pursuits had led to the demolition and rebuilding of the old city and the destruction of traditional meeting spots. Then, beginning in the 1970s, a key centre of affluence shifted as a new business hub was nurtured alongside the Pinheiros River in the South-Western part of the city. Many spots in the central zone were simply abandoned and the increasing wealth disparity led to an escalation of urban violence in the 1980s. The resultant paranoia, led to a surge in the construction of fortified residential towers and an increasing retreat from the street

Following the official handover of power, the members of *Grupo Tupinãodá* became absorbed with the catalogue of underutilised spaces in the city; their concerns over environmental sustainability and community engagement growing. *Tupinãodá* became the first group to paint in the ‘Batman alleyways’ off Rua Harmonia in Vila Madelena, São Paulo. Flanked on one side by the street art gallery ‘*Choque Cultural*’, which opened its doors in 2004, these spaces today represent a hub and display space for the more established members of the second and third generations of *paulista graffiteiros*. However, until *Tupinãodá*’s interventions in the mid 1980’s, these concrete walled zones lay empty and austere; neglected spaces brimming with potential.

Prades retrospectively elaborates on the group’s motivations for reclaiming these spaces, expressing the following:

There were, I suppose, two elements. First, the aesthetic: to give a new visual experience in a location that is normally forgotten, avoided or overlooked; to change perceptions about the space. And second, the art had a socio-political aim in that it sought to address the collective. This made it distinct from the elite art which still dominated and perpetuated social divisions (Prades 2011b).

Relatedly, Carratu (1989) indicates that through their art interventions, the group endeavoured to recuperate society’s more creative drives, which had been stunted by 21 years of military rule. Speaking from an abandoned recreation centre in 1989, Carratu states:

This space is typical, because it was constructed in 1976 more or less. In a place so short of technical resources and cultural information that people need, a space like this with thousands of square meters was never used for anything. So we decided to occupy it. Now we are trying to rescue it as a cultural space and bring its existence to people's attention.... this was a work of pure speculation, squandering money with no thought whatsoever. They said this would be a cultural center, but such a thing

interests no one in Brazil because people here don't care about culture. In the time of this construction, the mid-1970s, the political situation was very complicated. There was an ideological hunt going on, really a persecution of thought. So those people who were really articulating something, they had no power to do anything at that time (Carratu to Carlsson and Manning 1989).

Perhaps the most ambitious works undertaken by *Tupinãodá* in the aftermath of transition were the large-scale works or ‘mega graffiti’, which decorated the walls of the large underpass below São Paulo’s famous Paulista Avenue. Machines, labrynths, abstract structures, imagined cities, dragons and other mythical beings were cast amongst the array of colourful images that appeared on these previously dreary concrete walls. Notably, the group worked confidently in the light of day to produce this captivating array of characters and patterns, which have remained in the memory of *paulistas* to this day and have inspired subsequent generations of *graffiteiros* to undertake large-scale collective works around the city. The scale and audacious nature of the works here represented the force of their expression. Carratu explains the premise of the group’s work in terms of a “...power to act in the street, to occupy the walls, abandoned buildings and locations with weird architecture” (Carratu to Carlsson and Manning 1989) The tunnel paintings can certainly be seen in view of the group’s broader aim to open up spaces to the public by bringing a new visual focus to bear on the ruined, wasted and underutilised spaces in the city. In Carratu’s words, “We extend the street, really” (ibid.), colouring them to open them to the interest and excitement of passers-by; “...to show people what is possible” (Prades 2011b).

The works in the Paulista and Reboucas tunnels, which appeared towards the end of the decade in 1987 were soon followed by a spate of other aesthetic interventions across the city, as well as invitations to appear in gallery shows. Art critic Barreira describes 1987 as the year in which *graffiteiros* descended on the city of São Paulo, marking a fundamental shift in the



Plate 8: Ze Carratu, Carlos Delfino and Jaime Prades posing against one of their collective creations in 1988.



Plate 9: *Grupo Tupinãodá's* collective mega-graffiti, 1988.



Plate 10: Jaime Prades working on his 'robots' in the Paulista Tunnel, Sao Paulo.

balance of threats and opportunities for street artists (Barreira 1987). Whilst democratic governance had by no means been consolidated by this point, a convergence of factors tied to the political opening led to qualitative changes in the landscape, power and possibilities for *Tupinãodá's* street art interventions, hastening a shift in emphasis from their instrumental value in resistance to their extrinsic value as commodities and (now) as a source for popular history. Of course, for most art historians and scholars, this is the place where the story of Brazilian graffiti begins with the import of hip hop codes and practices from the United States and the burgeoning of colourful and highly aesthetic interventions across Brazil's key urban zones.

It is therefore possible to describe the collective *Grupo Tupinãodá* as part of a largely unexplored first generation of Brazilian *graffiteiros*, which emerged prior to the import and uptake of North American hip-hop codes and customs, paving the way for later generations to appropriate public spaces with their own brand of street art.

3.7 Brazilian street art articulations in theory and practice

The material presented in this chapter provides a range of crucial insights around the three guiding questions elaborated earlier on in the introduction and theoretical exposition. It provides some suggestive answers to the question of what kinds of social and political conditions might encourage a turn to street art as a mode or strategy in contentious politics. It also provides some insight as to what can the presence, style and concentration of politically committed street art can tell us about the socio-political context. Lastly, it demonstrates some of the ways in which can street art interventions feed back into the social milieu, altering or sustaining the possibilities for resistance.

The effort undertaken here, to chronicle the evolution and use of political street art in Brazil makes it possible to affirm that street art has historically been mobilised as a pro-system and

anti-system contentious performance. It has been produced and disseminated by state forces, institutionalised opposition forces and what those that we might call political outsiders and it has evolved in a process of continuous appropriation. The presence of pro-system and anti-system street art has accompanied periods of relative stability as well as periods of political change and representative crisis. Crucially, variations in the form and concentration of political street art can be seen to reveal important information about the prevailing context. Towards the beginning of the chapter, political posters were explored in some detail, revealing the ways in which their communicative and evidentiary functions and can be enriched, invigorated and indeed complicated by the pairing of text and image. However, this point is most clearly illustrated through the closer study of the São Paulo based street art collective *Grupo Tupinãodá*.

This chapter explains how *Grupo Tupinãodá* emerged as an organic and collective political response to the prevailing social and political conditions wrought by the dictatorship. It relays how the artist-activists linked their initial decision to go to the street with the representative vacuum and abuses of power that accompanied the ‘years of lead’. Some of the group’s early statements of intent were revisited to show the ways that their street presence sought to re-cast and popularise the ideas of the Brazilian modernists. Their aim with this was to highlight the contradictions inherent within modern ‘*anthropophagic*’ behaviour; to deliberately challenge and dismantle the rhetoric around national identity that had been crafted and maintained by the military regime.

Rather importantly, it has been argued that *Tupinãodá*’s street art interventions co-evolved with the protracted transition from authoritarianism to formal democracy. The shifting balance of threats and opportunities over this period was reflected partly in changes to the style, sophistication, and willingness of the *Tupinãodá* artist-activists to self-attribute. When

the risk of retaliation was at its highest, interventions were anonymous, and speedily produced in order to skirt the gaze and censorship of the authorities. As such, there is evidence to suggest that the characteristics of street art output do tend to vary according to perceptions about the level of threat, such that periods of repression breed ‘ritualisms’ of subordination; veiled acts of defiance that reduce the risk of retaliation. Collective production came as an initially strategic move driven by the desire to produce larger and more complicated pieces without police incursion. Following the transition to formal democracy, *Tupinãodá’s* use of street art evolved once again, reflecting the changing stakes wrought by the *abertura*. Increasingly the collective worked in the light of day, unimpeded by police; producing larger, bolder and more complex works in paint.

However, the case study also indicates other more complex forces at play, which complicate accounts of how street art feeds into the social milieu and illustrates how social movement theorists might work to elaborate a broader and more nuanced understanding of the environmental matrices or “political opportunity structures” within which activists operate. Taking the latter point first, it was shown how aspects in the content as well as the form of some of *Tupinãodá’s* early graffiti functioned to “re-reveal” the social order, such that receivers might perceive afresh, the possibilities for alternative ways of being. Additionally, by virtue of their very presence, the later mega-graffiti projects of *Tupinãodá* visually recasted physical spaces, opening up and inviting the use and occupation of neglected zones by the public. As such it can be convincingly argued that *Tupinãodá’s* street art interventions enabled what Kompridis (2006) has labeled ‘redisclosure’ of the physical and social space and the possibilities for action therein.

Moreover, tracing the group’s interventions in triangulation with some of their personal thoughts and reflections allows for greater insight into the subjective and inter-subjective

experiences and understandings that drive action and recourse to particular modes and forms of street art intervention. As evidenced by the interview data with Prades, Amaral and Carratu, there was a great deal of variation in the levels of cognitive processing and discursive engineering that went into the collective's interventions. The single-authored works in Pinheiros and the *A Bandeira* outdoor installation, which were produced during the latter years of the dictatorship are described by the artist-activists in terms of concrete objectives and deliberate invocations of symbolism. Notably however, descriptions around Rui Amaral's dancing figures and the mega-graffiti projects of the Sarney period, seem to indicate towards something deeper and less calculable. In the case of the former, the artist speaks of his intervention emerging from his heart, an expression of felt bodily sensation as much as a deliberate communicative strategy.

There also seems to be a strongly affective component to production in the case of the latter, which is indicated through descriptions of paint gushing out as *an almost automated response*; a transmission of varied and interwoven intensities and impulses in the wake of a hollow democratic transition. For this intervening period, the art was no longer premised on ideological objection. In fact it was not premised on anything that could have easily been described with established categories, reflected by the increased abstraction of the interventions. In this example, the interventions not only inspired a spate and subsequent generation of artistic endeavour, they also served an important immediate psychosocial function for the activists themselves, allowing them to express a jumble of feelings, processing them in creative interaction with each other and the surrounding environment.

Interestingly, what began as undirected creative manifestations, gradually evolved into describable and attributable phenomena. The group began to link their later mega-graffiti back to their meditations on the cannibal manifesto, thinking about the new works might

contribute to society as well as their potential for socio-political mediations in the aftermath of repression.

Tupinãodá's graffiti in the Paulista Avenue tunnels is remembered today by a whole generation of São Paulo's residents and contemporary street artists. A large part of the reason for this is that it broke with the urban visuality in such a profound way. The military regime's attempts to project its own aesthetic ideals onto the public space, coupled with its practices of censorship, resulted in enterprises and locales devoid of community engagement. *Tupinãodá's* large-scale graffiti set a visual precedent for creative enterprise, encouraging new modes of public expression that contributed to re-empowering a fractured and downtrodden civil society. Importantly, the re-casting of physical spaces and affective outpouring are crucial to the course of events that unfolded in São Paulo during the democratic transition. As such, this story of political street art and effective social change cannot be adequately relayed without recourse to the processual and affective. This is an argument that will be re-examined in the chapters to follow.

CHAPTER 4

Articulations in the clouds: street art and contentious politics in the city of La Paz

“You can want a microphone or camera like you'd want a rifle” (Paredes 2002)

“I took a bullet in my stomach” (Arandia 2011)

“It was important that we continue to counter the government's line, even in the fact of some level of threat” (ST, *Insurgencia Comunitaria*)

Art historians and journalists might readily question the choice of La Paz as a case study in the use of street art as a contentious performance, claiming that historically there has been very little writing or painting on the streets. It is true that from the three countries under study here, Bolivia's urban centres: La Paz; Santa Cruz; El Alto; Cochabamba and Sucre are probably the least articulated in terms of the visibility and sophistication of political street art both historically and in the present day. However, descending the hill from the world's highest airport at El Alto, which stands at a remarkable 4050m above sea level, into the valley that contains the city of La Paz it is clear to see that the streets of La Paz are hardly clinical. The white concrete walls that spiral downwards, lining the road and the facades of the once-white buildings which cleave into the reddish rocky landscape, are covered with political commentary. Some slogans are scrawled with little consideration to symmetry, balance or legibility. Others are obviously more considered, featuring bold large lettering, decipherable from tens of feet away. These works of graffiti utilise a variety of media including aerosol, masonry paint and even tar. Captions include *“Afuera USAID”* (Out, USAID) *“Todo va a cambiar”* (All is going to change), *“Lucho por La Paz”* (Fight for La

Paz), “*Te Amo MAS*” (I love you MAS)¹⁹. On entering the wealthier Achumani area of La Paz one may even encounter figurative stencils. To say that there is no political street art here would be a serious misrepresentation. The questions to be answered then are, when and why did activist street art arrive in La Paz, who produces it and fundamentally, what has its presence revealed about the political climate? This chapter sheds light on these questions and more, drawing upon a combination of first and second hand data generated from interviews conducted with current and former artist- activists, curators and academics in La Paz and London during 2011.

The chapter proceeds by first providing a brief overview of the ways in which political street art has developed and evolved in the Bolivian example up until the time of the National Revolution. It then moves on to explore the use of street art as a contentious performance by three separate collectives of artist-activists; each operating at a different historical juncture and political moment. Activists associated with the *Círculo 70* operated in a context characterised by repression and brutality under the military dictatorship of the 1970’s whereas both the anarcha-feminist collective *Mujeres Creando* and *Insurgencia Comunitaria*, the indigenous rights defenders, emerged during the democratic era, their activities highlighting gaps and contradictions in the discourses of sequential ‘representative’ civilian governments.

In order make sense of political street art in La Paz- its generation and evolution as a mode of protest, it is necessary to examine its development alongside key events and processes in Bolivian history, importantly the long and arduous struggle for substantive social equality for the country’s indigenous population. Bolivia is a country characterised by many unfortunate

¹⁹ Where MAS is a wordplay that refers to both the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement towards Socialism), the political party of incumbent President Evo Morales, as well as the Spanish word for ‘more’. It reads doubly as the lovers’ refrain, “I love you more” and a party-political commitment.

paradoxes. Whilst it is one of the richest countries in Latin America in terms of its natural resources, economically, it remains one of the poorest countries in the region, harbouring stark inequalities and one of the lowest indices for per capita income. Bolivia is the world's second largest producer of tin and it is endowed with large deposits of bauxite, iron, zinc, gold and other minerals. Notably, the extraction of over 62,000 metric tonnes of silver (BBC 2004) from mines at the *Cerro de Potosí* (Mountain of Potosí) buttressed the exorbitant lifestyles of the Spanish aristocracy and paid off Spanish debts, thereby fuelling much of Europe's development. However, Bolivia's infrastructure remains poorly developed and the only traces of Potosí's former glory are the mint and a few religious artifacts from the Peruvian Baroque (Nash 1993). Bolivia is today populated by over 9.2 million people, out of which, a majority of over 65% claim an indigenous Indian heritage (Van Cott, 2007). Yet for centuries this group was largely excluded from the political process and redistributive benefits derived from the extractive industries.

Bolivians have partaken in many fierce political struggles through history, leading James Dunkerley (1984) to conclude that the Bolivian nation has "Rebellion in the Veins". Many of the political challenges have been leveled by Indian groups, employing a mix of traditional cultural forms and inherited political understanding. One of the earliest recorded episodes of protest in Bolivia (then, Upper Peru) for example, involved the spread of traditional dance as reaffirmation of the Quechua culture against the spread of Catholicism. *Taki unkuy* literally translates as 'dancing sickness' and refers to the spread of dance and its role in an eventual revolt against the Spanish. About 200 years later, Spanish-speaking Indian, Túpac Amaru II led an uprising of approximately 60,000 Indians against the Spanish, capturing and executing one of the most abusive *corregidores de indios*.²⁰ Nash (1993:1) claims that "[Bolivia's]

²⁰ *Corregidores* (officers or magistrates) were appointed by the Spanish Crown to oversee local affairs in the colonies and strengthen Spanish authority. The *corregidores de indios* were charged with governing the Indian communities and were notoriously oppressive.

history of struggle since the uprising of Tupac Amaru and his ally Tupac Catari against the Spaniards in 1781 to the advent of the Che Guevara guerilla movement in 1967 reveals its people to be among the most politically responsive to revolutionary ideology”. Despite this, until quite recently the indigenous majority remained marginalised from the political arena and deprived of its full electoral rights. Universal suffrage was granted as recently as 1952 and it was only in 2006, more than five hundred years after the arrival of the Spanish, that Bolivians came to the ballot to elect an indigenous President.

4.1 Federal war to revolution: Indian affirmations; performative precursors and early political street art in Bolivia

The area formerly known as Upper Peru gained its independence from the Spanish in 1825, following 16 years of struggle between discontent *criollo* elites and the Spanish Crown. Simon Bolivar sat as the first president of the new Bolivian Republic. After 1879, Bolivia lost its coastal territory in the Atacama to Chile and thus became landlocked. In an interview in 2011 Edgar Arandia explains that after Bolivia gained its independence there was a short republican period dominated by the *criollo* elite, during which time a tribute system was maintained. This system required Indian communities to pay a tax in return for some level of autonomy *vis a vis* the state. Lucero (2008) highlights that revenue generated from the tribute system accounted for up to 75 percent of all taxes collected. Arandia (2011) explains that during this time, little or no attention was paid to the cultures and customs of indigenous population or members of the lower classes. The arts and literature in the new Bolivia largely ignored this broad swathe of the populace, marginalising its aesthetic and linguistic practices and ignoring their social and economic needs. As Eduardo Galeano (1974:46) reminds

readers, “Masters of Indian pongos²¹- domestic servants - were still offering them for hire in La Paz newspapers at the beginning of our century”.

The Federal war of 1898 evidenced Indians used as political pawns by the Liberal Party, who promised to defend communal landholdings in return for support. However, in the aftermath of the war the victorious Liberal leader Jose Manuel Pando failed to deliver on these promises, evoking a series of violent uprisings by *campesino* (peasant) groups. One of these uprisings, led by Aymara colonel Pablo Zarate Willka is noted by scholars as perhaps the largest Indian rebellion in Bolivian history. As Balderston and Schwarz (2002: 171) note, “...this rebellion reawakened in urban society, a fear of the Indian which had always been present since colonial times and unleashed rhetorical and physical abuse against the Indian in the early part of the century.” The radical ‘othering’ of Indians by criollo elites was reflected in a series of formal artistic works from the time. Artists such as García Meza began to paint indigenous subjects as mystical, alluring, even dangerous figures. In literature, writers such as Alcides Arguedas mistranslated Indian cultural practices as detrimental to Bolivian progress (Balderston and Schwarz 2002: 171). Arguedas’ 1919 publication, ‘*La Raza de Bronce*’ (The Bronze Race) achieved great notoriety at home and abroad. The book studies the activities and traditions of the natives of the Andean *altiplano* (highlands) and makes the argument for assimilation, claiming that Bolivia's untamed and uncivilised indigenous culture has been the greatest handicap to its longer term economic and political development.

During the Chaco War (1932-35), Bolivia drafted thousands of understandably ambivalent Indians to support the struggling army in their efforts against Paraguay. In an attempt to guarantee unity and commitment from the conscripts, criollo military officers gave emphasis to notions of “[an] Indian’s duties and obligations, and incidentally, his rights, his citizenship,

²¹ *Pongo*, derived from the term *poner* (‘to put’) has traditionally been used in the Americas to describe a domestic servant.

his equality before the fatherland” (Patch 1961:126). On the one hand, this emphasis on constitutional rights and substantive equality had a certain amount of rhetorical value for the Indian population. This could be seen in growing accord between social classes and ethnic groups as well as the work of acclaimed painters like Cecilio Guzman de Rojas.

On the other hand and as Barnitz (2001) notes, more cynical individuals took advantage of short-lived liberal government and its attendant discourses of inclusivity in order to set up rural schools intended to educate Indians in a range of trades and help them gain self-sufficiency. The consciousness-raising function of these schools was often aided by visual stimuli which took the form of murals and reliefs. Notably, these endeavours represent some of the country’s first documented examples of ‘political street art:’ those aesthetic interventions whose creative and material use of the street or public space is necessary to the political meaning that the producers wish to convey.

Perhaps most famously, in 1934, Aymara printmaker Alejandro Mario Yllanes painted a series of tempera murals on the schoolhouse walls of Warisata, a rural commune on the Bolivian shores of Lake Titicaca. These works were never completed, but were composed to portray and indeed celebrate the daily labors and achievements of the Indian peoples. Some murals depicted Aymara farmers, ferrymen and leather workers. Others portrayed images from Andean history and mythology. Bolivian art historian Carlos Salazar Mostajo (1989) has reviewed much of Yllanes’ works and opines that Yllanes’ paintings were special not just because they took the Indian as the subject but because, by extension, they paved the way for the contemplation of other groups in Bolivian society that had been marginalised from artistic efforts and made invisible by political and cultural institutions. In describing some of Yllanes’ works Salazar Mostajo explains, that the characters present:

An Indian that corresponded more to the image of the hero of the siege of La Paz²² than to the 'pongo' who served in the hallways. It did away with all meekness, all delicacy; the Indian is shown as forceful, ready to explode, as a power given to enter the action. Now the impulse is aggressive, the faces are angular, almost grotesque in form, not subject to canons or pre-established harmonies (Salazar Mostajo 1989:80, author's own translation).

The Warisata murals, he argues, present images of a quiet and peaceful life in the rural surrounds of Tiwanaku. The characters were not servile or humiliated and they went about their daily lives as though the *gamonal*²³ feudal patterns had given way to a brighter and more independent future for the Indian. Thematically, the murals were in line with the school's ethos to create and build the spaces of learning in ways that would underscore *ayni*, the complementarity of life.²⁴ As such, sustainability emerged as a clear theme in the depiction of traditional agricultural modes. The Warisata School murals carried and sought to evoke an Indian consciousness, presenting the Indian character as "a man already lifted" (Salazar Mostajo 1989:82, author's own translation), and depicting him in a large scale, historically reserved for portraits of important members of the colonial and religious orders. For the audience of Indian students, the scenes, painted in warm, coordinating hues offered an idyllic picture of a life to come; a promise of better, more harmonious ways of living alongside nature and thus inevitably, an indictment of the political, social and economic realities of the time.

Disingenuous government endeavours to instill a nationalist consciousness, the increased cultural recognition for Indian groups and the efforts of the emergent rural communes were all

²² The 'siege of La Paz' refers to the 6 month period in 1781 where the city was bombarded by Tupac Katari and his followers.

²³ The term 'gamonal' refers to a rural landowner or feudal landlord.

²⁴ In traditional Andean culture, the notion of *Ayni* describes the complementarity of life, the ways that everything in the universe fits together. In practice, teachings at Warisata revolved around the principle of being at the service of the universe.

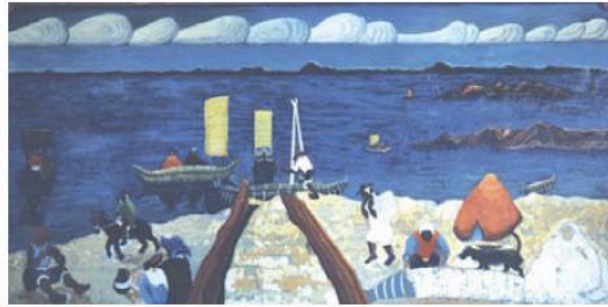


Plate 11: Three images from the murals at the Warisata School painted by Yllanes in 1934.

important elements which came together to impart a sense of entitlement upon the Indian population. However, their expectations departed wildly from the reality of ethnic segregation of soldiers in the Chaco War. Officers were invariably of European descent and Indians were forced to serve on the front line as cannon fodder. The incommensurability of liberal discourses with the empirical fact had a catalytic effect on indigenous political mobilisation and spurred a wave of community - *colono*²⁵ uprisings which “...spread from La Paz to Oruro, Potosí and Sucre in 1934, but were put down by the time the Chaco War concluded in 1935” (Hylton and Thomson 2007:69).

4.2 Hacia la Revolución Nacional (Towards the National Revolution): regional influences, domestic uproar and ‘the social painters’

Following Bolivia’s defeat by Paraguay, the loss of valued territory, coupled with the staggering number of mortalities²⁶ and poor economic climate produced widespread disenchantment amongst the intellectuals, working classes and disaffected urban groups. Hylton and Thomson (2007:70) note that in the late 1930’s and early 40’s, Indian community insurgency was eclipsed by “the protagonism of increasingly radicalized miners, rural tenants, student and the nationalist parties and regimes tied to them”. Traditional oligarchic parties were upstaged by the emergence of a new mass politics, paired with the founding of new parties unified in their aims to break down the established order. These included *Partido Obrero Revolucionario* (Revolutionary Workers Party or POR) in December 1935, the *Falange Socialista Boliviana*, (Bolivian Socialist Falange or FSB) in 1937, *Partido de Izquierda Revolucionaria*, (Party of the Revolutionary Left or PIR) in 1940 and the *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario*, (National Revolutionary Movement or MNR) in 1941. Witness accounts claim that battles between the competing factions were initially

²⁵ *Colono* is a term often used to describe the ‘landless peasant’.

²⁶ Over fifty-four thousand people were killed in just 6 months.

fought out through campaign posters and symbology on the streets, as well as financial patronage and occasional violence. As in Brazil and Argentina, political sentiments began to see expression on the street inscribed with tar and other home-made media, as members of broader society sought to communicate their angers, frustrations and affiliations for all to see. The situation in La Paz became increasingly unstable and the MNR was forced into exile after social tensions mounted, culminating in President Villarroel's murder by street mobs, his body infamously hung from a lamppost in the Plaza Murillo for all to see.

Prior to the National Revolution of 1952, "Bolivian society and its power structure were [still] cast in the rigid mold of the Spanish colonial institutions". It was the function of institutions such as the *latifundio*²⁷ to define the status of Quechua-speaking peoples as "serfs-beyond the pale of the urban, Spanish-speaking society; without hope of mobility" (Patch 1960:124). Kohl (1978:240) states that "The [*sexenio*], that crucial six years from Villarroel's death to the 1952 revolution, was an age of heightened repression and rebellion." During the *sexenio*, the MNR re-emerged as the leading opposition group, repeatedly taking the side of the workers in disputes with the government and ardently promoting nationalisation. The MNR also gained the support of Quechua and Aymara communities by advocating for Indian rights and land reform after promises to enact new social legislation made at the National Indigenous Congress were not fulfilled. In 1949, the party, with many members still in exile, made a failed coup attempt and in 1951, the MNR's Victor Paz Estenssoro made a legal bid for the presidency, backed by the *Partido Comunista de Bolivia* (which had evolved from the PIR). Although the MNR unquestionably won a plurality of votes, Paz Estenssoro was prevented from taking power in an 'anti-communist' military intervention instigated by the outgoing president, Mamerto Urriolagoitia Harriague

²⁷ *Latifundios*, more commonly called *haciendas* or *estancias* are large land holdings, the rights to which originated under colonial laws that allowed forced labor recruitment and land grants for military services.

(Hylton and Thomson 2007).

Patch (1961) highlights that it was plain from levels of public outrage and disaffection towards the government in 1952, that if Bolivia did not have an MNR government it would have no government. A takeover occurred earlier than planned due to a military defection and on the 9th April 1952, the MNR, backed by the POR and the *Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia* (FSTMB) led a march on the capital of La Paz. Miners, factory workers and Indians turned out to participate, armed with weapons provided by the MNR. Short but intense clashes ensued over a four-day period, after which time the military ranks collapsed and the army surrendered to Hernan Siles Zuazo, who declared himself provisional President whilst Paz Estenssoro was in transit to Bolivia (Hylton and Thomson 2007).

Following the defeat of the army and the handover of power to Victor Paz Estenssoro the mines were immediately nationalised, universal suffrage was introduced, overturning prior literacy and property requirements which enabled fewer than ten percent of the country to vote (effectively excluding the Indian majority, women and the peasantry at large). An agrarian reform program was implemented, enabling Indian subjects to reclaim lands from large hacienda-type holdings.²⁸ The miners' movement maintained a strong level of influence in government, co-governing mine administration and receiving a veto power in the *Corporación Minera de Bolivia*, (Mining Corporation of Bolivia or COB) decisions. The miners' movement also established the Workers' Federation, *Central Obrera Boliviana*, (COB) which adopted the *Pulacayo thesis*, an adaptation of Trotsky's Transitional Programme, drafted by Guillermo Lora for the FSTMB in 1946. The MNR governed Bolivia for the next 12 years, winning elections in 1956, 1960 and 1964.

²⁸ Previously up to 95% of land had been held in large estates of over 10k hectares, owned by descendents of the Spanish elite.

Notably, key social actors and exponents of the National Revolution understood and promoted art as a tool of national political transformation (Salazar Mostajo 1989). The new government set aside financial resources for increased cultural activity and was especially encouraging of a burgeoning muralist movement led by the group now known as ‘the social painters’: Walter Solón Romero; Miguel Alandia Pantoja; Lorgio Vaca and Gil Imana. In 1953, Victor Paz Estenssoro invited the Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, to Bolivia. This visit had a large influence on the direction of public art and initiated a rich exchange of ideas between the two countries about the role of art in revolution (Arandia 2011), particularly the notion of making art accessible both physically and intellectually to the public.

The Solón Foundation (2011) writes that Walter Solón is perhaps best remembered for his murals and frescos,²⁹ including, ‘*Historia del Petroleo Boliviano*’ (History of Bolivian Petroleum) which was painted in the nationalised Petrol Industry offices in 1959, ‘*Monumento a la Revolucion Nacional*’ (Monument to the National Revolution), produced in 1964 and ‘*El Retrad de un Pueblo*’ (Portrait of a People) (1985-1989) which can still be viewed in the Salon of Honour at the University of San Andrés in La Paz (UMSA). The Solón Foundation (2011) describe several recurrent icons in Solón’s art including a stone with eyes which he hoped would remind Bolivian’s of the need for historical memory; a winged painter named Anteo whose feet remain firmly rooted in the earth who symbolised the necessity of maintaining realistic goals and humility, as well as “Don Quixote, the tireless fighter for justice in a world that considers him mad” (ibid.).

Whilst Walter Solón is rumoured to have been heavily influenced by Mexican muralist David Siquieros, Montoya (2011) writes that Bolivian artist Alandia Pantoja was inspired by Orozco. Pantoja, who was largely self-taught had served and been captured during the Chaco

²⁹ The application of paint into wet plaster. This method of wall-painting stretches back to the Early Renaissance in Europe.

War and subsequently fled to Paraguay where he came to understand the war as a despicable endeavour hatched by vying imperialists at the expense of powerless soldiers from both countries. By way of "...assuming a more serious commitment to the dispossessed masses" (Montoya 2011, my translation), Pantoja returned to Bolivia and "...became an active militant Trotskyist [with the] *Partido Obrero Revolucionario* (POR) and during the *sexenio*, was one of the founders of the National Workers Union, the immediate predecessor of the Bolivian Workers Central (COB)" (Montoya 2011, my translation).

Pantoja's murals celebrated the workers, portraying their importance to the economy by rendering them on a large scale. He pays homage to the "...myths and legends and the life of miners and peasant masses in their struggle against the old landed and commercial mining oligarchy, to express in a visual language, the rejuvenated and resounding universal longing of man of our times: revolution" (Pantoja, cited by Montoya 2007, my translation). Pantoja's murals include: '*Historia de la Medicina*' (History of Medicine), a mural of 50 square metres in size, which was made on canvas initially and then installed in the Worker's Hospital of La Paz in 1956; a series of five murals painted on the building of the state company YPFB, which took '*El Petroleo*' (Bolivian oil) as their subject and the 1964 production entitled '*Lucha del Pueblo por su Liberación, Reforma Educativa y Voto Universal*' (People's struggle for their Liberation, Educational Reform and Universal Suffrage), an extremely large scale mural commemorating the 1952 revolution which can be seen from Plaza Villarroel in La Paz.

The sophisticated and considered works of Solón, Pantoja and the other 'social artists' took on a didactic function in loose association with the MNR's revolutionary and redistributive principles. Unlike the earlier, more pastoral muralism of Yllanes, these works were intended to foster and maintain a national unity and pride in line with a more militant leftist

revolutionary ideology. Scale and visibility were thus crucial factors, and location was carefully considered to enable maximum exposure for the masses. Ensuring maximum exposure generally meant placement in the cities; in large public buildings, plazas or parks. Aspects in theme, location and presentation largely supported the government's line that the spaces they occupied belonged to the people; the workers, students and minorities whose past and future labour contributions sustain the state in material terms.

Patch (1961:124) claims, that "[t]he revolution not only placed the land in the hands of the men who cultivated it, it also destroyed the institution of latifundio, and went far towards replacing the castelike status of the Indians with a class concept of campesino in which mobility is possible". Whilst the Bolivian National Revolution of 1952 marked a decisive moment in Bolivian history, instituting major changes to the socio-economic structure of the country and yielding hope for a largely impoverished populace, longer-term outcomes for indigenous peoples were not so encouraging. As Hammond (2011:650) explains, the successive developmental and nationalistic MNR governments "...attempted to organize the indigenous population from above on a non-ethnic basis—to identify them as peasants and treat them as a social class. The assumptions that the dominant culture is superior and that the indigenous population should be assimilated to it went unquestioned". This is largely reflected in the works of Solón and Pantoja, where Indian cultural practices receive no distinctive treatment.

4.3 *Contra la dictadura* -street art as resistance to authoritarianism

As General Hugo Banzer came to power by force later on, street art actions emerged in response to the repressive conditions of his rule. Many of these actions were undertaken by artists and activists associated with the *Círculo 70*, a movement founded with the aim of engendering a politically relevant and socially conscious art that would combat inequality,

US imperialism and political violence perpetrated by the state. Explored in this section, Edgar Arandia and other artist-activists who later formed the collective *Benemeritos de la Utopia*, provide crucial insights into the modes and strategies of resistance; the battle for political and creative freedoms that characterised the seven years of the *banzerato*.

After shifting in an increasingly conservative direction over the 1950's and deepening Bolivia's dependence on US tin contracts and development aid (both conditional on a commitment to anti-communist counterinsurgency) the civilian of Paz Estenssoro regime, was toppled in 1964 in a military coup led by René Barrientos and backed by US interests, sealing a shift to the right over the short term. Barrientos was pro-market, anti-union and staunchly anti-communist. When advisors told him of the rising popularity of Che Guevara and his clandestine forces the Bolivian southeast, he ordered armed troops to storm the mining camps of Llallagua. This episode occurred during the festival of San Juan and resulted in 20 dead and over 70 injured. The war between Barrientos and Guevara's *Ejército de Liberación Nacional de Bolivia* continued on until Bolivian Army Rangers captured Guevara and his militia in the Vallegrande region and executed him in October 1967.

Following the unexpected death of Barrientos in a helicopter crash in 1969, Juan José Torres, known affectionately amongst the left-wing as '*Jota Jota*' rose to power. However, his rule was short-lived as right-wing Military General Hugo Banzer masterminded a successful *coup d'état* with US and Brazilian backing in 1971. President Juan José Torres was forced to flee to Buenos Aires, where he was later assassinated by President Videla's forces under the auspices of *Operación Cóndor*.³⁰ The *Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense* (Team of Argentine Forensic Anthropologists or EAAF) report from 2007 explains how Banzer was

³⁰ *Operación Cóndor* was a clandestine intelligence programme backed technically and financially by the United States, which sought to eradicate Communist influence in Latin America. The military governments of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay and Paraguay are alleged to have cooperated in the capture, cross-border transfer, torture and assassination of accused communists in the mid-1970s. *Operación Cóndor* is described by McSherry (2005:xviii) as a "transnational programme of repression"

able to consolidate his power in 1974 by replacing all civilian politicians with military personnel. Banzer's military regime ruled without interruption until 1978, in this time banning political organisation, closing the universities, dispensing with freedoms of expression and forcing all major opponents into exile (Morales and Sachs 1987).

Edgar Arandia (2011) relays that during the Banzer period the topic and image of the Indian was erased from the art world almost entirely as the government dictated rigid guidelines to the cultural institutions, backing their orders with threats of violence. Banzer ordered police to destroy the social artists' murals, as a show of zero tolerance towards 'revolutionary spirit'. Alandia Pantoja's *'History of the Mine'* (1953), a critique of the mining oligarchy, which was in the main hall of the Palace of Government as well as his *'History of Bolivian Parliament'* (1961), which had been installed in the Legislative Palace, were both destroyed in May 1965. Additionally, Arandia (2011) notes that the police removed paintings by the Mexican muralist Diego Rivera from the museums for fear that they would spur a popular uprising. These works were never recovered.

During Banzer's reign, murals and large-scale fresco painting was outlawed but the 'social painter' Walter Solón continued to produce his *Quixotes* in other formats, such as drawings and tapestries that could be moved, copied and distributed to avoid destruction. Also risking their physical security, others like Edgar Arandia, Silvia Penaloza, Max Aruquipa, Diego Morales and Aiza Benedict (now deceased), who would much later merge to form the group *Beneméritos de la Utopía*,³¹ decided to take to the streets during this period, using street art forms to demonstrate the persistence and intractability of the resistance, both to the regime and to the broader populace. Clandestine art interventions were sometimes made in daylight

³¹ The *Beneméritos de la Utopía* are all former participants in the *Círculo 70*. They reunited as an artist-activist collective in 1990, guided by an ethical imperative to deconstruct one-sided historical accounts, combat arbitrary power and restore a cultural presence to the long subjugated Indian majority (See Ryan 2013).

but with much haste. More time-consuming pieces were produced under the cover of dark, or in abandoned areas in order to avoid the violent reprisals of the authorities (Arandia 2011).

Arandia (2011) explains that these actions would sometimes be the initiatives of smaller cliques within the *Círculo 70*. The *Círculo 70* was founded in 1972, by a group of young artists who shared a collective aim to make a national stand against the strong external influences propping up Hugo Banzer, influences which would much later be fully revealed as part and parcel of the United States' regional anti-communist undertaking, known as *Operación Cóndor*. The *Círculo* consisted at one time or another of the artist-activists: Silvia Peñaloza; Edgar Arandia; Mario Velasco; Juana Encinas; Inés Nuñez; Erasmo Zarzuela; Ricardo Pérez Alcalá; Benedicto Ayza; Windsor Arandia; Héctor Terceros; Emilio Tórrez; Enrique Pacheco; Froilán Argandoña; Aydé Aguilar; Cristina Endara; Gíldaro Antezana; Julio César Téllez and Luis Ángel Aranda (El Diario Cultural 2012). The group sought to politicise their art and through their work, comment specifically on the Bolivian context. This set them apart from other Bolivian artists and the intellectual elite of the time which was more concerned with developing trends in the USA and Europe.

Círculo 70 meetings, as well as other meetings of resisters generally occurred at night and in secret to avoid alerting the authorities to their activities. At these meetings, students, academics, artists, former unionists and other dissidents would come together to strategise acts of insubordination. They designed and disseminated many 'auxiliary modes' of street art (Chaffee 1993) including fliers and pamphlets containing poetry intended to "move the spirit" (Arandia 2011) and remind people that they should not be obliged to live in fear. They also devised political symbols and slogans to be inscribed at street level as a way of mobilising fellow citizens. Often these inscriptions would play to public perceptions about the regimes' attachment and subservience to the United States or try to harness felt injustice to spur action.

Arandia (2011) recalls commonly painted slogans around the streets of La Paz, including, “*Libertad para los prisioneros*” (Freedom for the prisoners), relating to the arbitrary arrests and detentions for those suspected of leftist collusion; “*Muerte a la dictadura*” (Death to the dictatorship); “*Viva la revolución popular*” (Long live the popular revolution) “*Viva la democracia*” (Long live democracy); “*Patria o muerte*” (Homeland or death); “*Muerte US imperialismo*” (Death to US imperialism). The preservation of anonymity was often possible in the production of these public denouncements, making these kinds of urban inscriptions- I will call them graffiti- a popular tool in the ongoing psycho-political battle against the state.

Usually the slogans in question were painted at speed with quick-drying water based paints. However, they were frequently and very quickly covered over by government forces, who sought to ensure and maintain an imaginary of the street as an ordered space, reflecting an equally ordered and regulated society. Arandia (ibid.) notes that even though the government forces would always come along to paint over the denouncements, there was a satisfaction to be gained from preoccupying them with this mundane task. Importantly, whilst the actual expressions did the framing work at the cognitive-linguistic level, the visual noise generated through graffiti interventions seemingly worked over onlookers and activists at another level. Arandia (ibid) alludes to the feelings of empowerment, purpose and hope that were sometimes brought forth by seeing these inscriptions appear at greater frequencies in the surrounding environment. A process emerged by which interventions became almost self-sustaining practices, the sight of each, encouraging yet further efforts by generating a greater confidence and conviction amongst activists.

Although specifically outlawed, during the mid 1970’s murals began to appear in empty spaces such as abandoned stations and back alleys, where the risk of being caught painting was substantially reduced. Arandia (2011) recalls that around the ten-year anniversary of the

death of Ernesto Che Guevara, large-scale colour murals of the guerilla fighter appeared in spaces in El Alto. The image of Guevara, by this point had become an internationally recognised symbol for defiance against capitalism, the USA and its puppet regimes. By recalling a hero of socialism and eminent opponent of the Bolivian military; a political figure who died at the hands of the regime as he sought to bring about greater social justice, the Che murals again deliberately sought to undermine the government's ideology, policies and repressive actions by providing a visual cue to remind onlookers of one of the most heinous crimes committed.

Arandia (2011) points out that another highly effective contentious performance to emerge under the dictatorship was street theatre. In La Paz, dissidents were often resource poor, lacking both financial options and access to channels of communication. The virtue of street performances was that they required nothing more than one's own body and a creative impulse. As contrasted with graffiti interventions, activists engaged in street theatre had a somewhat reduced the risk of capture and punishment. Without the concern for tools of any kind, "...a crowd could quickly assemble in a plaza or street to watch improvised political satires or re-constructions of military crimes and just as quickly an audience and its performers could disperse and melt into the city" (Arandia 2011).

Street performances re-emerged as a popular tool of dissent under the García Mesa dictatorship. During 1980-81, artist-activists, Roberto Valcarcel and Sol Matteo devised performances for the street. Additionally, underground magazines, pamphlets and other ephemera were produced in the early 80's including the publications, '*Trasluz*', '*Comprada Mouser*' and '*Papel Hygenico*' (mimiograph). These highly critical publications were dispersed on the streets and during meetings of resisters. In his study of street art in Hispanic countries, Chaffee (1993) draws attention to the utility of such underground media in political

struggle. In the absence of an open and pluralistic political system, Chaffee argues that underground ephemera serves an important role in breaking the complicity of silence under authoritarianism. Arandia's comments seem to support this proposition:

The distribution of magazines and pamphlets were important at this time. There was no freedom for journalists and the publications reminded people of the government's illegitimacy, making a mockery of the military, the president and his circle of allies. They also demonstrated that resistance to the order that the state tried to impose through force and threats. (Arandia 2011)

However, there is increased risk associated with the setting up of underground publishing houses as opposed to the more improvised and/or low technology modes of expression. Magazine publications require a more or less permanent physical space for equipment to be used and stored as well as financial backing that can often be traced back to particular individuals or groups. There is also a literacy requirement placed on the readers, which can, in certain instances be exclusionary. According to the UNESCO Institute for Science and Statistics, Bolivia exhibited an adult literacy rate of 63.2% in 1976, growing to an estimated 66% by 1981 (IndexMundi 2012). The virtue of the more pictorial and theatrical expressions in Bolivia, was thus their accessibility at all socio-economic and literacy levels. Citing the example of *taki unkuy*, Warisata muralism as well as some of the theatrical expressions that emerged under the regime, Arandia (ibid) explains that where Bolivians of lower socio-economic status- usually those of indigenous origin- have historically been denied access to institutionalised channels, they have always sought to express their political will through other means; often through strongly aesthetic modes such as painting, performance and dance.

Under both Banzer and García Mesa the punishment for dissenting actions on the street were jail, torture and even death. Indeed, the impulsion and fervor with which the regimes sought to quash this form of low technology communication attests to its very power. The director of

‘*Trasluz*’, Rene Bascopé was among those assassinated for the production of underground publications and leftist associations. Notably, Solón’s drawing ‘*Quixote y los perros*’ (Quixote and the Dogs) was conceived in 1971 and was disseminated as a denouncement of the regime, an expression of outrage at the disappearance of his oldest son and the oppression of the social movements. Solón was himself later detained and tortured by the military police who threatened to cut off his hands, making plain the level of power and disruptive potential his creations were perceived to carry (Cabezas 2011).

Members of the *Círculo 70* and other dissident groups also suffered for their creative endeavours when discovered. Diego Morales was captured, tortured and eventually forced into exile (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 1982). Edgar Arandia was himself shot and exiled, travelling to Ecuador, Haiti, Mexico, Germany and Spain before returning to La Paz in the democratic era to take up a position as an art director:

The punishments for actions against the regime were severe. I was known to the government for my activities in the art circuit and on the streets. I took a bullet in my stomach and had to leave for fear that next time I would be dead (Arandia 2011).

All of these street art actions played a role in counter-framing the official discourse of the regime. As indicated in the interview conducted with Arandia, improvised means such as graffiti inscriptions, flyer dissemination and street performances served as ways by which to hold government actors to account in the absence of the rule of law. They also enabled an alternative social commentary to continue in the absence of an organised official opposition and a free press. In so doing, the street art modes countered and defied government attempts to project the image of an ordered and cooperative society, based on an effectual social contract. Acting as a psycho-political tool that reminded the populace that alternative

viewpoints existed and change *was* possible, such endeavours sewed the seeds for and created a hidden infrastructure for an active resistance movement to communicate and organise.

4.4 *Mujeres Creando, mujeres denunciando*: transition, patriarchy and the push for deconstruction

Civilian rule was finally restored to Bolivia in 1982, with the collapse of the military government and the accession to power of Siles Zuazo, who had years earlier broken ties with Victor Paz and the MNR to form the *Unidad Democratica y Popular* (UDP). With the political opposition again legalised, political campaigns regained considerable visibility on the streets. Printed posters and painted slogans instructing the populace to vote for this or that candidate, party or outcome bedecked concrete walls and shop windows. Politicians and their representatives canvassed energetically. However, democratic transition failed in the first instance to engender a reciprocal exchange between political elites and broader populace. As this section will explain, the representational vacuum experienced during transitional era was a driving factor for political activists who emerged to form the anarca-feminist collective *Mujeres Creando* (Women Creating). This section traces, in context, the emergence and evolution of *Mujeres Creando* as claim-makers. It utilises material drawn from interviews with the founding members to establish their motivations for using street art as their primary campaign tool, how they compare the efficacy of street art with other types of contentious performance and how they perceive their choices to interact with the changing matrix of political opportunities.

Siles Zuazo “...took charge amidst high expectations and a robust sense of popular power” (Hylton and Thomson 2007:90), which saw considerable expression through street art. However, he inherited an economy already on an inflationary path, with price rises reaching hyperinflationary proportions in April 1984. Unfortunately, Zuazo’s traditional approach to

economic management failed to produce a turnaround. There were no sources of loans or buyers for government bonds abroad; public knowledge of foreign exchange scarcity only exacerbated the problem as exporters ceased to hand over a proportion of their dollar earnings to the Central Bank efforts to de-dollarise were swiftly followed by a wave of capital flight, which exacerbated both the liquidity problem and worsened levels of inflation. Additionally, the institution of exchange rate and price controls and increased export taxes, measures intended to curb inflation, had strong welfare costs, led to a rapid expansion of the informal economy and were met with strikes and opposition from the FTSMB and the left. UDP attempts to negotiate with and appease business groups inspired uprisings from other sectors of society. Hylton and Thomson (2007:90) note that “The UDP government emitted ever more currency to cover the cost of the agreements it signed with unions and civic committees, and in the early 1980’s Bolivia became the country with the highest inflation rate in the world.” In May 1984 the government stopped servicing the foreign debt and in the face of loss of support Siles Zuazo called for elections in 1985 instead of the scheduled 1986 elections.

Víctor Paz returned to the presidency in 1985 after fighting an election against former dictator, Hugo Banzer. Paz was considered the more moderate candidate and thus surprised the public when he sought to implement Banzer's neoliberal ‘shock’ program under the name of the New Economic Policy (NEP). The NEP involved: removing exchange rate controls and barriers to trade in order to attract FDI back to the country, renegotiating the external debt with international creditors, denationalising key sectors and cutting state payrolls. The government devalued the peso from 75,000 to the dollar to one million to the dollar, making imported goods completely unaffordable for much of the populace. Problems were compounded by the fall in tin prices on the international markets. Tin, which had provided a great proportion of government revenue since before the 1952 revolution, was suddenly turned from Bolivia’s most lucrative product to its biggest liability. Mines were privatised as

a coping measure and Hylton and Thomson (2007) highlight that more 20,000 miners were ‘relocated’ (fired or displaced) from Oruro and Potosí under Supreme Decree 21060. Many of this number were forced to fend for themselves in the informal economy, along with a raft of peasant migrants from the countryside, where mere subsistence had become a fundamental challenge. Others migrated to the Chapare region and began to produce coca, the market for which had expanded massively over the 1980’s, as a result of an increase in demand for cocaine from the United States (García 2005).

Paz Estenssoro’s measures, Dangl (2010) argues, had the effect of breaking the “backbone of the country’s radical workers’ unions”. Hylton and Thomson (2007: 96) elaborate:

Arguably Latin America’s most combative proletariat in the second half of the twentieth century, the tin miners were broken when Paz Estenssoro- who had first risen to power on the strength of the miners’ militias in 1952- crushed their “March in Defense of Life” in 1986. The FTSMB and the COB would never again have the same capacity to agglutinate a broad array of forces around a national popular program.

Left political parties entered decline as initial hopes of a transition from ‘dictatorship’ to ‘democracy’ to ‘socialism’ faded. The political momentum, which had accumulated with the return of civilian rule and evoked the 1952 revolution, had dispersed along with its key protagonists: As María Galindo (2010:55) describes it, “The miners’ movement collapsed like a house of cards, and that brought down the entire popular movement. It practically signaled the death of politics, the politics of resistance”. Whilst crippling the poor and disempowering civil society and the unions, international observers from the IFI’s viewed the NEP as a resounding success, giving little incentive for the government to change tack. It is from this context of representational crisis, at a time when “the social movements of Latin America were still sleeping” and “neoliberalism, was in full bloom” (Dangl 2006) that *Mujeres Creando* emerged.

4.5 A new ‘craziness’

Mujeres Creando was founded by three activists, Julieta Paredes, María Galindo and Mónica Mendoza. Whilst the collective was formally established in 1992, Galindo indicates elsewhere that the movement has its origins around 1985, when there began “...a ‘revolution’ in the use of public spaces such as the street” (Galindo 2010:55). The group, which has its headquarters in La Paz, has been described by one of the founders as a “craziness” (Paredes 2002), dedicated to overturning and dismantling oppressive structures in Bolivian society. Since its birth, the collective has played protagonist in a number of campaigns geared towards effecting social and economic change. Members of *Mujeres Creando* have initiated and participated in a broad range of struggles against social and economic inequalities as well as the endemic violence tolerated and sometimes sanctioned by the state. From the very outset, the *mujeres* have utilised street art interventions as their primary tool or tactic aimed at galvanising the Bolivian public.

Notably, the three founders began their political lives more or less aligned with existing leftist party organisations, and, in concert with their contemporaries, they were dismayed by the choice of economic policies undertaken by the government as well as Banzer’s (and others’) continued immunity from prosecution for the crimes and abuses committed under the period of military rule. As Julieta Ojeda (2002) explains: “At the beginning, we focused on the dictatorship”. However, whilst sharing a range of frustrations with the organised left, Galindo, Mendoza and Paredes soon came to some disheartening realisations about their male colleagues and collaborators. On the one hand came the very clear sense that they, as well as the broader populace were being instructed rather than involved in the democratic reconstruction; that the changes being sought were not being elaborated from the bottom-up and that the institutionalised parties, both left and right were failing to engage with voters on

any meaningful level. On the other, they increasingly found that their gender was perceived to be an obstacle to their full participation.

As one member of the *mujeres* explains, the group's impulse toward street-based *pintadas*, or graffiti, as a contentious performance, transpired in part from a desire to publicly rebuff the direction and instruction of political parties and candidates of the right and the left, whose campaign posters and painted commentary lined the streets:

It was our response to their painting in the streets saying "Vote for so-and-so". They were affirmative or negative phrases, "No to the vote", "Yes to this", "No to that".

(Paredes 2002)

The University of New Mexico (2009) hosts a virtual archive of political posters from the transitional period, which largely corroborate Paredes's comment. During the run-up to the 1985 elections, handbills were disseminated across the city of La Paz, which quite simply replicated ballot papers, with the relevant candidate's section colourfully highlighted. The handbill used in Jaime Paz Zamora's campaign, shows his photo with campaign colours of red and blue and his logo, a rooster. These elements are juxtaposed just as they would appear on a ballot paper with an instruction to the voter: "*busca el gallo y marca en el cuadrado blanco*" (look for the rooster and mark in the white square). A handbill for the *Partido Democratica Cristiano* in the same year follows the same general layout pattern and reads "*Bolivia no se acaba salgemos de la crisis. Vota con la Democracia Cristiana*" (Bolivia will not find a way out of the crisis. Vote with the Christian Democrats). These campaign tools, were directive, rather than engaging. They were measures in coaching the electorate. Resultantly, a large chasm emerged: "[u]p at the top, in terms of public order, the politicians were deciding things, but the people were actually sorting out their stuff on the streets" (Galindo 2010).

Galindo further explains that as a result of the changes wrought by neo-liberalism, “the street became the most important survival space, the most important forum for the whole of society” (2010:55). Indeed, the absence and delegitimation of traditional mobilising institutions such as the trade unions and the political parties, coupled with rising unemployment and informalisation effectively made the streets the most important site of struggle. This struggle did not involve a scramble for political power but rather aimed to carve out new modes of continuation, subsistence and progress amid rising levels of socio-economic turmoil. A number of scholars (Robinson 2009, Hite and Viterina 2005) have made similar observations, registering the emergence, across Latin America, of a form of “non-hierarchical grassroots organising that is independent of political parties”, which treats the territory as “the new factory” (Robinson 2009:297). The street re-emerges in this discourse as both the site of productive activity and a key forum for exchange and mobilisation in the wake of a perceptibly ‘hollow’ democratic transition. For Robinson, the new modes of decision-making and organising reflect what he calls an ethos of “horizontalism”, explaining that “...such horizontalism, a hallmark of the new wave of social movement struggles in the Americas, rejects hierarchical forms of organising and operating, emphasises democratic-often consensus- decision making within popular organization, coordination among distinct sectors and movements with respect for each one’s autonomy, and rejects any form of subordination to political parties and to states” (ibid).

Galindo, Mendoza and Ojeda thus had a clear and informed sense of where elements of the political left should be most active, yet they struggled to get their voices heard in meetings and demonstrations. As they explain, it seemed that whilst the women of the left provided essential numbers and votes, in the party meetings, “...the women only served tea, or their role was a purely sexual one, or they were nothing more than secretaries” (Paredes 2002). In another interview, Paredes elaborates further:

The other part of our criticism of the Left is toward what has been a constructed social practice; that is, it was unethical, dishonest and it had a double morality. Revolutionary in the streets, revolutionary in their words, revolutionary in their talking, yet, at home, they were the dictators of their own families, with their own loved ones. (Paredes 2002)

Paredes (ibid.) expresses their felt need to split “...from the arrogant, homophobic and totalitarian Left of Bolivia during the '80s, where heterosexuality was still the model and feminism was understood to be divisive”. As Galindo and others have pointed out, in neo-liberal Bolivia, women led the charge to take back the streets, strengthening the social fabric by “...converting public spaces into domestic spaces” (ibid.), co-operating and organising to ensure their material needs were met.

Moreover, women’s autonomous practices, political and social initiatives have long been overshadowed by patriarchy. One need look no further than the historical social practices of *cholas*³² for evidence of mobilising strength, political imagination and pragmatism. “[I]ndependent of their husbands and of the wage-labour market” (Seligmann 1989:705), *cholas* subsist on the surplus they can generate through moving and trading goods between the rural communities and those urban residents and producers engaged in the formal capitalist economy. In the market-place, *cholas* co-operate with each other to establish new contacts and to avoid agents of the state who seek to formalise their ventures by charging taxes and issuing licenses. Interestingly, rather than accelerate the assimilation of *chola* women and eliminate unregulated economic transactions such as street-vending, the neoliberal reforms of the 1980’s in fact boosted the role and importance of *cholas*, who played intermediary and provider of essential goods and services between a much expanded

³² *Cholas* may be described as the women market-sellers of contemporary Bolivia and Peru. They are often identifiable by their bowler hats, (or white stovepipe hats in Peru) layered *pollera* skirts and colourful woven *mantas* (shawls).

and much impoverished pool of excess labour based in the cities and a disarticulated agricultural sector (Seligmann (1989). Historical sources place *cholas* at the site of many a political protest, where they have often rallied in support of peasants and rural workers. After General Luis García Meza's coup of July 17, 1980, which ousted President Lidia Gueiler Tejada, peasants, miners *and* *cholas*, participated in extensive uprisings across the country and "...built blockades to prevent the flow of goods to and from rural areas" (Seligmann 1989:715). These actions had the desired effect of (at least temporarily) weakening the power base of the new military junta.

Unfortunately however, the predominance of women's social and economic activity in the Bolivian market-place was not related to qualitative improvements in their lots or the guarantee of greater protections for them. Galindo explains that the aspirations of *Mujeres Creando* were molded in this context, its founders seeking to aid and directly engage with women, *cholas* and others, in these street communities, where a non-violent defiance was unfolding, far removed from institutional and party-political channels.

4.6 The task(s) of street art in the wake of a hollow democratic transition

Following on from the points just highlighted, the fundamental tasks of the *mujeres* have been to bring a plurality of political opinions into public view, to explore the grey areas of public consciousness and expose the democratic deficit perpetuated by a system in which one white (or, mestizo) and male-dominated government after the next, would enthusiastically carry out drastic economic reforms,³³ with little consideration of the social costs and little consultation with civil society groups.

³³ These reforms were backed by the International Financial Institutions; the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB). When Paz Estenssoro assumed the office of President, the WB created a brand new unit and engaged a new team to back up the (orthodox) initiatives of the Bolivian government with policy advice and financing. The IMF and the WB put together what was then a wholly new WB/IMF instrument, the Policy Framework Paper (PFP), with the goal of persuading the international aid community to address what was understood to be an impossible debt situation and justify the sourcing of greater funding, especially from the International Development Association (IDA).

The founders of *Mujeres Creando* were all too aware that the ways by which they relate to people on the street would be essential to their mission to promote a more inclusive economic and social order. Their aim was thus to stay attentive to the needs and aspirations of regular citizens, and particularly women whilst at the same time pushing the established boundaries of possibility for political participation and activism. With these things in mind, the group developed a distinctive cursive style of tagging, vaguely reminiscent of the banners and posters of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* in Buenos Aires, and they took to the streets with it, painting provocative, disestablishmentarian phrases across the capital. The subjects of their interventions have ranged from impunity and the fall-out from neoliberal programming through to racism, homosexuality and domestic violence.

When asked in a 2011 interview about the motivations for their primary graphic style, Julieta Ojeda responded that: “This is the way we are all taught to write in the school. So it is easy for us; any of the women can reproduce the style. It means we can spread our messages in more spaces with a consistency of style that helps people to recognise when it is us who speak” (Ojeda 2011, my translation). She also alluded to the possibility of being able to make expressions both as one and as many. In this way, any individual woman who is picked up and detained by the police for acts of vandalism, has recourse to the moral and perhaps even financial support of her fellow activists. There is a movement solidarity, which is fortified in a sense by the uniformity of the writing style.

Furthermore, unlike the artist-activists of the dictatorship periods, *Mujeres Creando's* interventions are not anonymous. The group marks all of its street art, with a distinctive cursive signature, flanked by the universal symbol for anarchy. They are not guarded about their work and claim to take full responsibility for the consequences of their artistic interventions. As Paredes (2002) claims, “...all our work that we do, the graffitis are not

anonymous - we put what we want, and everybody knows that MC is in this area, and if someone wants to put us in jail, he or she comes here and does it". Paredes (2002) contends that:

...we've thought about our right to do it... Coca-Cola pays and paints, Repsol pays and paints, so why can't we paint without paying? The problem isn't that the walls are painted, the problem is that it's not paid for. If we must pay for public space, then it's a big contradiction in democracy. What's public and what's private? Streets are public space, the whole city's a courtyard, not a jail hallway, where you go from the jail of your house to the jail of your office job... if it's public, then everybody can use it. But if you pay for public space it becomes private. Public space doesn't exist. Let's start this discussion.

This quotation is insightful in terms of the motivations and thought processes of the *mujeres* and it is indicative in terms of the evolving context for claim-making in the aftermath of democratic transition. At one level, the excerpt confirms Chaffee's prediction (and McLuhan's hope) that when political parties, government ministries and commercial advertisers use the walls and streets as a medium; they set a precedent which may well be taken up by activists and claim-makers who, witnessing its galvanising power seek to appropriate the medium and turn it to their own purposes. Notably, in post-dictatorship Bolivia the legal status of graffiti emerged as something of a grey area. Technically, its production contravened the rules of the state, making it a defiant and possibly seditious act. Yet, it became much harder for the state to discourage such interventions or impose penalties when, de facto, the city walls were also frequently utilised for the dissemination of propaganda by contending politicians and their parties as well as commercial advertisers.

It is clear from her comments above that Paredes disparages this scramble for display spaces by the political and commercial elite, declaring their encroachments democratically unviable.

This contention reflects a broader crisis of representation and recuperation in the Bolivian transitional aftermath. Crucially, when the military regimes took power, they circumscribed rights to political expression and all critical elements were forced underground. The public spaces were largely purged of their 'public', pluralistic and representative components and in this way, the very appearance of such spaces was incorporated as an ideological tool; a visibility, intended to support a particular model of the ordered society. Rather than return the public spaces to the preferences, need and uses of the community following the formal democratic transition, there was a sense that they had been turned over to the commercial and political elites, who used them in operation over the broader public, whilst simultaneously crowding out the more localised and plural expressions with financial barriers in line with the new neoliberal modes of governance and social organisation.

Having witnessed the failure of institutionalised channels, *Mujeres Creando's* efforts consciously and effectively discharged an immediate action to neutralise the power of these elite groups. Rather than writing a letter of complaint; marching in support of a policy change or lobbying influential political actors, they moved to produce their own commentary, initiating street art-constituted counter-situations or anti- environments. This is nowhere more apparent than around the site of their headquarters in La Paz. In (2006) Galindo, Paredes and Mendoza purchased a building which they rather audaciously named *La Virgen de los Deseos* (The Virgin of Desires). Their aim was that this space should operate as a meeting place and refuge "...for university students, mothers with babies, women from the country and city, lesbians, Aymaras and Quechuas". Dangel, 2006 explains that the group "organised health classes, maintained a library on childcare and ran a natural food store." Graffiti, banners posters and glaringly bright paint adorn the entire building, demarcating this as a free women's space, a creative harbor and a noncompliant zone of the city.

What's dirty? What's clean? "You're making my walls dirty!" Oh, so when Coca-Cola

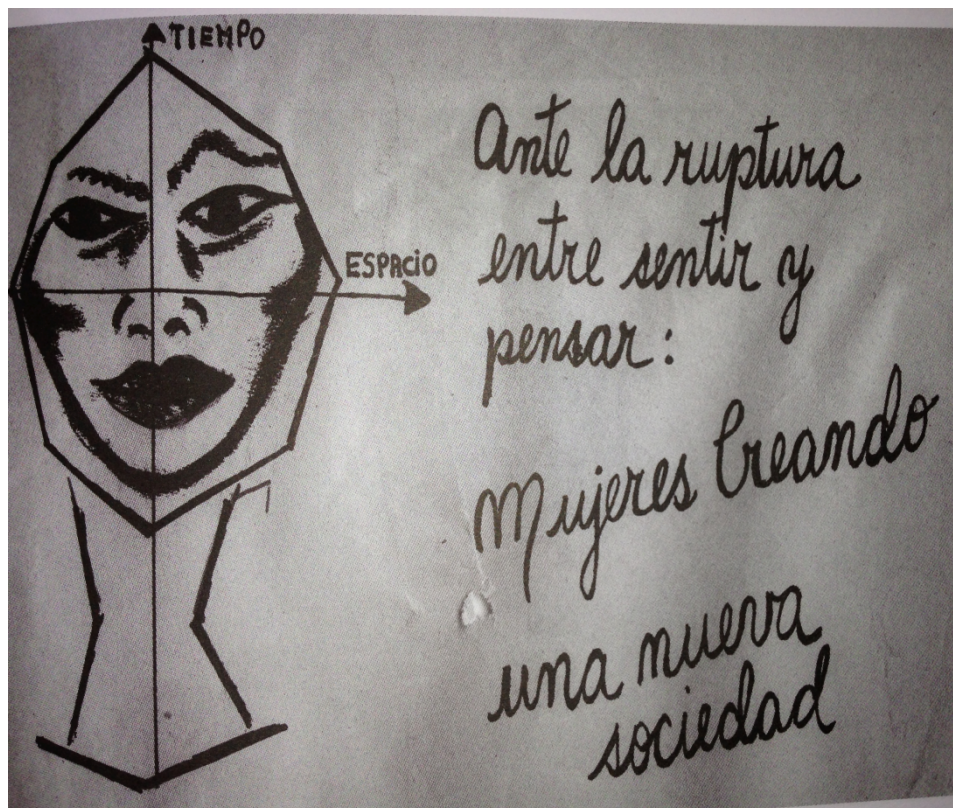


Plate 12: Graffiti by *Mujeres Creando*, written in 1992 reads, “before the rupture, between feeling and thinking: Mujeres Creando, a new society”.



Plate 13: *Mujeres Creando* graffiti, reads “The street is my colourful home, without a husband and without bosses”.

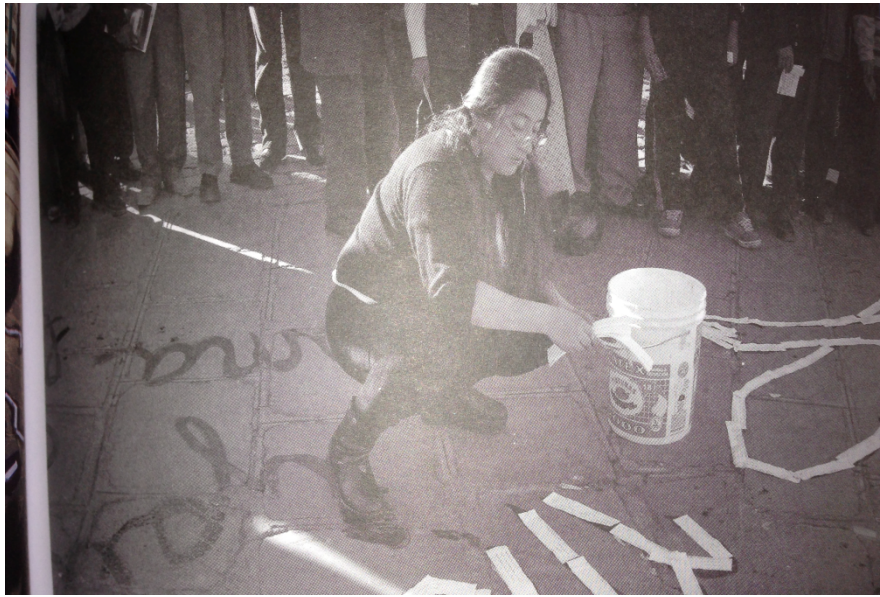


Plate 14: Julieta Ojeda of *Mujeres Creando* participates in a street-based intervention or *pintada*

contracts a painter, it doesn't make the wall dirty? That's an aesthetic concept. It seems to me that it has made the wall dirty in a disgusting way. And what we have done, our graffiti, that's beautiful (Paredes 2002).

Interestingly, Paredes here alludes to the subjective or more accurately, the inter-subjective nature of aesthetic preference and she incorporates this into her argument for access to and plurality in the public space. The activists seem to deal with questions of aesthetic value and visuality in considered and experimental ways. This is evident in the range and diversity of their interventions.

Whilst graffiti actions have been the tool most frequently employed by the *mujeres* it is worth noting that they have also designed and participated in a range of interventions without words. One street performance, which related to the atrocities committed during the dictatorship relied upon the symbolic power of certain colours, actions and objects in Bolivian society: "...we mainly use[d] symbols, rather than being explicit. We also use[d] theater: to symbolize blood, we use[d] red dye; for death, we use[d] crosses; for joy, we share[d] bread and flowers with people" (Ojeda 2002).

In another intervention, the *mujeres* slept together on mattresses placed in the middle of one of the city's main shopping districts, as a protest against the widespread homophobia, which afflicts Bolivian society. The *Libertad* Gay Movement in La Paz (MGLP Libertad) (1996) cited by UNHCR (1999) explain that, in Bolivia, homosexuals have been pigeon-holed as undesirables that are outside society's normal moral code. Discrimination makes it difficult to gain access to welfare or specialised healthcare services and "the economic and social advantages of being part of a family far outweigh the disadvantages of a gay identity, such as homophobia, concealing one's identity and leading a double life...Furthermore, the police and the courts can hardly be counted on to protect gay people, when they are threatened by

problems such as violence, threats, blackmail or slander and the like”. After a number of high profile events, including the detainment and beating of around 120 gay men in 1995 and the violent murder of four wealthy homosexuals in the same year, the *mujeres* sought to bring an image of homosexual practice directly into the public view where the public would be forced to confront it.

The aim of these trans-linguistic events was to jolt aesthetic sensibilities and unsettle expectations of the visual field in key public spaces. Interestingly, experiences, time-frames and media layer one over the other to this very effect in *Mujeres Creando's* project for the “*Principio Potosí: ¿Cómo podemos cantar el canto del Señor en tierra ajena?*” (The Potosí Principle: How Can We Sing the Song of the Lord in an Alien Land?), a travelling exhibition which sought to draw the links between exploitative economic practices, past and present. The exhibition project was devised in 2008, by Berlin-based artists/curators Alice Creisher and Andreas Siekmann working in close collaboration with the writer and critic, Max Jorge Hinderer and aims to interrogate and expose the palimpsests of the colonial past by juxtaposing colonial baroque paintings with responses and interventions from contemporary artists, activists and workers. Unlike most of *Mujeres Creando's* earlier artistic interventions or ‘performances’, which predominantly took the form of graffiti or mural art at the street level, the Potosí intervention appeared as an multifaceted installation piece, which first transplanted the image from a colonial era painting to the La Paz streets, and then documented a pair of performances surrounding the image and transplanted these back into the gallery space in a kind of reciprocal provocation.

Galindo's art installation piece documents street-level responses to the collective's creative interventions which were based around a pair of paintings from the Potosí Baroque period. One of these paintings, ‘*Virgen del Cerro*’ (anonymous and dated 1720) is a clear example

of the ways by which Catholic iconography was superimposed on or merged with indigenous motifs, reflecting the global principle of Christian doctrine, which dictated that Christian icons would be used to replace local myths to ease the transition from heretic to godly society. The composition of this image follows a triangular formation, the image of the *Cerro Rico* (Rich Mountain) providing a pinnacle which points up towards the heavens. The Virgin Mary is captured in the image of the mountain. The Virgin is the character that colonial authorities superimposed on the Andean vision of *Pachamama* or Mother Earth. Surrounding the Virgin/mountain is a collective of earthly male figures: the Pope, the king of Spain and certain colonial officials.

Two separate street performances were designed around this piece. They were recorded on camera in La Paz and then played on repeat alongside the Baroque painting in the gallery and annotated with the *Mujeres'* cursive graffiti, which read: "*Ave María llena eres de rebeldia*" [eng: "Hail Mary, you are full of rebellion"]. The first performance features a large-scale painted replica of the '*Virgen del Cerro*', which had been carried to a marketplace in La Paz and gradually deconstructed by a female performer, clad in white, who emerges from the portrait of the Virgin Mary. The performer first disentangles her own body from the confines of the image. Followed intently by startled onlookers in the marketplace, she proceeds to destroy the remaining painting piece by piece, defacing the portraits of the male figures of the piece: the Pope, the king of Spain and certain colonial officials. The second video features a white, blonde-haired woman dressed in a larger than life crown and brightly coloured ball-gown adorned with Barbie dolls. She carries an inflatable plastic globe in one hand and a platter with the head of a lamb in the other. '*La Virgen Barbie*' is attended by *cholas* who assist her in a journey to the top of a mountain, carrying her litter on their backs. Once the procession ends, '*La Virgen*' begins a speech:



Plate 15: A large scale replica of the '*Virgen del Cerro*' the public presentation of which was filmed by Mujeres Creando



Plate 16: A character representing Mary, full of rebellion, emerges from the large scale painting.



Plate 17: *Mujeres Creando*'s installation for the Potosi Principle exhibition in Berlin, featuring the Baroque painting along with the group's responses in the mediums of video-art and graffiti.



Plate 18: A still from *'La Virgen Barbie'*.

I do not want to be the Virgin Barbie. I do not want to be the patron of racism and the protector of capitalism. I do not want to be the Virgin Barbie. I do not want to teach girls to hate their bodies...

She proceeds to descend from the litter, gives the inflatable globe to a nearby child who plays with it as though it is a ball. She then begins to undress, revealing a body wrapped in bandages. The *cholas* tend to her wounds and then dress her in the *pollera*. She then proceeds to wash their feet. As Moreno, citing Galindo (2010) explains, the imagery here signals that ‘*La Virgen Barbie*’, despite fulfilling the aesthetic ideal-type originating with the colonial system, is too imprisoned and done violence by the structures and practices of patriarchy. By undressing she reveals her wounds to the *cholitas* and in this way finds a unity with them that crosses the racial and socio-economic divide.

Against the argument that politically committed street art is vacuous at the aesthetic level, the endeavours of the *mujeres* are evidently guided by a particular concept of the beautiful, which is intimately tied to a specific ethic. This ethic privileges nondiscrimination and equality in the social sphere; it also favours the facilitation and celebration of creative freedom. Responding to questions over gallery- installations like the Potosí Principle, Julieta Ojeda explains “We are street activists, we are creative women, but we are not artists and we don’t want to become into an artistic elite. We take up our right to create and to do new things.” (Ojeda 2002). She continues,

Creativity is human – it belongs to all women and men. But many want to dispossess us of this creativity, something that is ours. They want to turn creativity into something elitist, saying the artists are the creative ones, the inspired ones, the ones who inspire each other. We do not allow ourselves to be dispossessed of an instrument of struggle and in everything we do, in the books we make, in the street actions, in the graffiti, we include this element which is important and fundamental

to us: creativity. Then some people say to us: “You’re artists.” But we are not artists, we are street activists. All we do is to use something which is totally human: creativity.

For the *mujeres*, the creative interventions that they undertake are something greater than a communicative instrument but they are not equivalent to formal art. The interventions are rather an opportunity to express themselves in extra-discursive ways; a means of countering, overcoming and thoroughly dismantling the dominant discourses, and themes in Bolivian society. *Mujeres Creando* describe their street art interventions as means to “conquer words”. They do not use the verb ‘conquer’ lightly. When questioned about the power and utility of aesthetic tools in this process, they respond: “You can want a microphone or camera like you'd want a rifle” (Paredes, 2002).

4.7 EVOLutions in articulation: *graffiteando por el TIPNIS*

Whilst it still aims to shock and challenge the street art interventions of *Mujeres Creando* are today more familiar and broadly tolerated across the city of La Paz. Many activists and reformers outside of the institutional circuit have taken up the gauntlet of the *Mujeres* and, in 2011, La Paz is experienced as a city saturated with visual noise. This pluralisation of the public space, an enterprise boldly initiated by the *Mujeres* over a decade beforehand, was catalysed by the “indigenous awakening”, of the 1990’s and subsequent rise to power of Evo Morales in 2005. Notably however, the ascendancy of the Morales government has not only encouraged street art articulations in La Paz but is today increasingly the target of them. Policy decisions around the supply and price of natural resources and wage levels have led to large-scale mobilisations in recent years and, in 2011, Morales faced a raft of protests from indigenous groups opposed to a highway project backed by the Brazilian government. The final study from La Paz is based around interviews conducted with ST, SG and NK, young

political activists who took to the streets in 2011 and began to produce street art in defence of indigenous communities residing in the Isiboro Sécore National Park and Indigenous Territory (known by its acronym of TIPNIS), their rights to autonomy and to consultation as guaranteed in the 2009 Constitution. ST and SG form a part of the movement *Insurgencia Comunitaria* and NK is a trained graphic designer. All three activists have been ascribed pseudonyms to protect their identities in what is an ongoing struggle against the Morales government.

As Hammond (2011:651), explains, beginning in 1985, two decades of brutal neoliberalism exacerbated the deprivation felt by broad sectors of society, and most strikingly those of indigenous origin: “[i]ndigenous communities were vulnerable to its fiscal austerity, promotion of a market for land, and commercial exploitation of natural resources. Mines, the country’s principal natural resource, were privatised, driving thousands of mostly indigenous miners into unemployment”. However, as he also points out, the devolution of administrative responsibilities to more local levels, coupled with the 1992 quincentenary of the European discovery of the Americas gave new opportunities and ambitions to organise around the cause of indigenous rights and to demand that the government regain control of the states’ natural resources.

Indigenous people, making common cause with others in popular movements, joined to protest neoliberal austerity and, in particular, to demand that the government reassert control of the country’s natural resources. They periodically paralyzed the country, drove two presidents out of office, and then won the election of their own candidate, Morales. He won a striking victory with 54 percent of the vote, the first time in recent history that a president had won an outright majority (Hammond 2011:651).

Hammond (2011:652) expresses that the rise to power of Evo Morales “...represented the

convergence of two struggles: one against five centuries of domination by Europeans and their descendants, and the other against two decades of neoliberalism.” Emerging from a popular movement founded on access and expression for the marginalised majority, the Morales government, in seeking to remain ‘close to the people’ has been tolerant, if not encouraging of street art articulations. Or so at least it had seemed.

4.8 Background: on the ambivalent discourses of Bolivia’s first indigenous president

The election of Bolivia’s first indigenous president, backed by social forces largely composed of the poor and dispossessed marked a significant event in the country’s history. His rise to power as head of the *cocaleros* followed mass demonstrations against neoliberal economic policies, which culminated in a series of violent confrontations on the streets and forced two presidents from office prematurely. Supported by a highly mobilised raft of contentious actors including indigenous communities, workers, peasant and agrarian movements, Morales assumed the Presidency with the promise of redesigning the Bolivian state and its economy to redistribute wealth away from transnational elites, eliminating the *latifundio*³⁴ and giving a political voice to the historically underrepresented indigenous majority, ‘ruling by obeying’ as he put it.

When he came to power, Morales moved to fulfill some of his campaign pledges with haste. Executive decrees and laws passed by the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement towards Socialism or MAS) dominated Congress re-established state centrality in economic planning and development (Postero 2010). Morales announced plans for agrarian reform in August 2006 at the symbolic site of Ucureña, where President Víctor Paz Estensorro had signed the Agrarian Reform Act into law five decades prior. In December 2006, Morales completed a

³⁴ In Bolivia, *latifundios* originated under colonial rule and have been preserved in the hands of those of European or *criollo* descent. Landed inequality remains deeply etched in the geographical and political landscape of Eastern Bolivia, where approximately one hundred and fifty families own almost all of the productive land (Fabricant 2011).

gas nationalisation programme, followed later on by moves to nationalise oil, mining, telecoms and electricity companies. Additionally, the MAS government coordinated a popularly elected Constituent Assembly to rewrite the country's constitution in a way that resonated with the rights, values and demands of the country's poor and indigenous majority. A new Bolivian Constitution was debated in the Constituent Assembly in 2006 and 2007 and adopted by referendum in 2009. The new Constitution cemented important provisions serving to recognise and assist the country's majority indigenous population, including new restrictions on land ownership and a whole chapter dedicated to indigenous rights. Additionally, it remapped autonomous governance, creating four levels of decentralised authority: the departmental, regional, municipal and indigenous. Relating importantly to the latter, the constitution also legitimated the practice of indigenous community justice (Hammond 2011) and provided guarantees of consultation over the future development of indigenous territories in line with internationally agreed standards.³⁵

Until very recently, Morales enjoyed a high level of popularity at home and abroad. Bolivia's first indigenous president enjoyed favourable electoral results when he came to power in 2005, receiving 54% of an 85% turnout. Following the successful institution of many of his campaign promises, seen above, he was re-elected in 2009 with 60% of the vote on a turnout of 90% (Hylton 2011). As Fabricant (2011) explains, although his policies were unpopular with right wing voters, concentrated in the Eastern lowlands, Morales' credentials as an Aymara coca farmer and long-time defender of workers' rights and social justice gave him widespread acceptance from broad swathes of society, with many *originarios* identifying with him as 'one of them'. As Hylton (2011: 243) highlights, "Regionally, Morales's Bolivia has enjoyed better relations with neighboring Chile, Argentina, and Brazil than any regime

³⁵ See the Universal Declaration on Indigenous Peoples' Rights and the International Labour Organisation's Convention 169.

since General Banzer's, during the darkest night of Plan Condor". In the global arena, Morales has become a vocal and respected protagonist, advocating for indigenous rights and against climate change in an array of international fora. In 2007, Bolivia became the first country to sign the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, a document which had been thirty years in the making. The following year Morales addressed delegates at the inauguration of the United Nations' VII Indigenous Peoples' Forum where he espoused a set of ten 'commandments' for saving the planet. Moves to stage the first World Peoples' Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in Tiquipaya in 2008 as well as other rhetorical stunts have increased Morales' popularity with leftist commentators and civil society organisations in the Global North.

Yet, for all the gushing oratory about social justice, sustainability and environmental protection, "there remains a considerable gap between rhetorical claims of "participatory democracy," socialism, and non-capitalist development, in contrast to the reality of policies and practices that undermine the autonomous political mobilisation, and/or economic interests, of popular sectors" (Calla and Striffler 2011:239). A macroscopic look over the MAS period reveals deep patterns of continuity with the preceding neoliberal period. Webber points out that with the exception of moderate reforms to oil and gas policy and the extension foreign and trade relations on the continent, the key economic imperatives of the government remain committed to a progressive development of industrial capitalism. The not-so-green extractive industries for example have been key priorities³⁶ and ministers of government frequently refer to socialist transformation as a vague and distant objective, possible only after Bolivia undergoes a period of gradual and progressive development in its Capitalist phase (Webber 2008 and Webber 2012).

³⁶ Between 2005 and 2008, mineral and hydrocarbon exports rose from US\$1.9 billion to \$5.4 billion (Revenue Watch Institute 2012)

The problem stretches further than Morales' supposed economic *catholicism* and ambivalent discourses however. A further and perhaps more unassailable issue pertains to meeting the conflicting demands of a diverse support base, indeed the conflicting demands of groups who all self-identify as 'indigenous'. The Bolivian government notes that there are 36 native indigenous groups residing in Bolivia, the largest of which are the Aymara and Quechua groups who together number some 2 million. Many of these *pueblos originales* work in the productive sector: the extractive industries; agriculture and services. Cholas notably occupy a space between the modern productive sector and the informal barter economy and many smaller rural communities do not seek to engage with the modern capitalist economy, limiting their productive activities to self-sustaining agriculture and the production of crafts.

Inevitably, these groups project divergent interests and values, particularly when it comes to the course of national development. Yet, the 'indigenous ascendent populism' (Webber 2008) of the MAS government is premised on an indigenism that speaks with one voice. It is implicated in the construction of an *indio permitido* (authorised Indian) (Hale cited by Webber and Carr 2012). In Hale's cynical yet instructive thesis, Indians are pacified by their gaining recognition as citizens. However, this gesture veils an uneasy compromise with governing elites, as, in the interests of reciprocity, they are expected to respect the integrity of the existing structure of productive relations. Webber (2008) claims that "in the case of MAS, the implicit condition has evidently proven to be that very few inroads will be made on neoliberalism under its watch, provided that is, that the popular classes and indigenous nations cannot rebuild autonomous organisational capacities outside of the governing party to force it to implement substantial reforms". In the case of Morales' Bolivia, *el indio permitido* also seems to be *el indio productivo* (the productive Indian), as the case of the recent TIPNIS episode illustrates.

4.9 The plans for *el TIPNIS*

In August/September of 2011, one of the most salient and polarising political issues to touch La Paz was Evo Morales' plan to build a highway through the middle of the Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory, or *el TIPNIS*. The TIPNIS is a national park and a self-governing territory, which covers 1,091,656 hectares and plays host to 402 species of flora and 714 species of fauna, including endangered birds and water mammals such as the pink dolphin (ST 2011). Whilst providing an important source of bio-diversity, it is also home to the estimated 12,000 people belonging to the Yucaré, Chiman and Moxeño indigenous communities, who have populated the area for thousands of years (Salgado 2011). Following the adoption of the new Constitution in 2009, these resident indigenous groups were officially granted a collective land title, granting them autonomy and they were guaranteed the right to 'free and prior consultation' regarding any planning that would affect their land. As Achtenberg (2011) underlines, "[t]his unique model had its origins in an earlier cross-country march organised in 1990 by lowlands indigenous organisations, which Morales accompanied as leader of the Chapare coca growers union federation. The historic March For Territory and Dignity is credited with putting the demand for indigenous autonomy, and for a Constituent Assembly to make it possible, on the national agenda".

The proposed highway was to run from the outskirts of Cochabamba, through a pristine area of the park and jungle region to join another highway at San Ignacio de Moxos that runs from Yucumo to Trinidad. The plan, backed financially by the Brazilian government as key part of the Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America (IIRSA), would assist in the creation of a bi-oceanic corridor, drastically reducing shipping time and costs by facilitating horizontal movement across the continent. At the domestic level the Bolivian government staunchly defended the road-building project, claiming that its

construction would aid in the development of the indigenous communities of el TIPNIS, enabling the more remote groups to access vital supplies. Notably, however, community leaders from the reserve pointed out that the planned route ran nowhere near the established indigenous settlements, rather running directly through the centre-west of the national park, where there exist virtually untouched, areas of primary forest and fragile eco-systems.

Another angle, brought into focus by Achtenberg (2011) and Webber (2012) relates to the wider rural cultural and class dynamics of the issue. Notably, since the 1970's, waves of Aymara and Quechua colonists, originally dislocated miners from the Bolivian *altiplano* (highlands), have settled in the South of the park. Today, some 15,000 colonist settlers outnumber the native indigenous population by a ratio of almost 2 to 1 (Achtenberg 2011). Unlike the Yucaré, Chiman and Moxeño communities, who operate primarily outside of the market system, the colonists require increasing tracts of arable land and access to markets for their products. As Webber explains, in terms of productive relations, the colonists can be considered as a 'rich' strata of the peasantry, with aspirations to expand accumulation through the appropriation of further land. He notes that:

Geographically, to one side, we find possibilities of expansion into the department of Santa Cruz. But this would imply incursions into the inhabited lands of other Aymara-Quechua migrant peasants, or the small, medium and large-scale capitalist agricultural and ranching expanses that make up the agro-industrial sector of that department (Webber 2012).

Encroachment in these areas has not been something the MAS government has been willing to contemplate for several interrelated reasons. Firstly, the Indian settlers in this region are productive rent earners. They are organised through their *sindicatos*, many of which are affiliated with the coca growers' federations of the Chapare, whose president is Evo Morales. Thus, they form a key component of the MAS support base and it makes little political or

economic sense for the government to uproot them. It is not the first time that Morales has placed profitability over political principle. Notably, the Morales' administration has faced its most staunch opposition from the wealthy department of Santa Cruz, where business elites and right wing parties exercise political and economic control and have pushed for secession. Despite the transformationalist rhetoric about redistribution and nationalisations in Santa Cruz, Morales has been slow to intervene with land and property ownership in the region, repeatedly expressing his government's respect for private property.

Following the logic of capital, encroachment into the TIPNIS territory to the North gives greater scope for accumulation. Here, "...we encounter the largely non-capitalist social relations of the *Mojeños-Trinitarios*, *Chimanes* and *Yuracarés* —that is, communities based on collective self-reproduction through small-scale agricultural activities, the extraction of forest resources, and artisanal production" (Webber 2012). In spite of the "red line" drawn up in 1990, by Morales (as head of the coca growers' federations) and the TIPNIS leaders to contain colonist settlement and protect the traditions and practices of the communities, "[i]ncreasingly, layers of the more traditionally oriented indigenous communities are forced into semi-proletarian status through a process Marx called "primitive accumulation", as they are compelled to sell their labour power for part of the year to ranchers, timber barons and the rich layer of the *cocalero*, or coca-growing, peasantry" (ibid.). The government's total willingness to destabilise cultures engaged in largely non-capitalist modes of production has been most transparent in Morales' imprudent public statements likening the indigenous communities of the TIPNIS to savages and asking for example why they simply refuse to be modern (Flores 2011).

4.10 Street art in defence of the ‘unauthorised indian’

As discord around the TIPNIS issue grew, the streets of La Paz became saturated with graffiti, posters, murals and stickers; creative interventions, which sought to frame and counter-frame actors, disseminate information and mobilise actors to one or other cause. In 2011 and 2012 it became possible to engage with activists from two groups involved with the pro-TIPNIS street art production. Due to mounting tension in Bolivia and risk of state retaliation, they wish to remain anonymous. ST and SG, who form a part of the activist collective *Insurgencia Comunitaria* and NK, an illustrator by training, have coordinated several large scale interventions in La Paz. Notably, ST, SG and NK are members of a burgeoning group of young adults living in La Paz who are dissatisfied with the current economic and social order. Recognising that Evo Morales’ election was a profound and symbolic moment in the long struggle for racial equality, they believe that in the past few years he has reneged on election promises, failed to institute measures to protect Bolivia’s biodiversity through sustainable development and crowded out all dissenting opinion in the public sphere with allegations of imperialist meddling. As ST explained to me, “...whilst the election of an indigenous President in 2005 represented a sea-change for Bolivian politics, Evo Morales is not a representative figure for all Indians. He was a *cocalero*, he is a colonist by background, and the policies he implements do unfortunately reflect his greater sympathies with those who want to till and cultivate the land for planting coca and soy” (ST 2011).

During 2011, the three activists, along with many other Bolivians began to follow the dispute between indigenous groups living in the reservation and the Morales administration far more closely. From 2009, until the middle of 2011, the main protagonists supporting and representing the TIPNIS cause in the urban areas of Cochabamba and La Paz had been small

groups of environmentalists and biologists from the state universities, interested in the preservation of the habitat in the reserve. ST and several of his friends explained that in La Paz, the very first graffiti interventions relating to the issue had appeared on the streets in 2010. In large part, these consisted of slogans, written hastily with aerosol paints, which took the destruction of the environment as their theme: “Don’t destroy mother earth” “Forest is life” were phrases seen on the streets, particularly in the areas around the university (ST 2011). However, limited interest and awareness from the domestic and international media, as well as Bolivian society more broadly, resulted in a subsidence of the issue in the public consciousness. This was followed by the slow erasure of related graffiti.

From the middle of 2011 however, the issue once more came to the fore, this time heavily swathed in the discursive framings of indigenous peoples’ rights which have been so championed by the Morales government. The largely successful shift in framing was assisted by the increased visibility of the protesting TIPNIS communities. When the community leaders announced that whole families from the reservation would begin a 375 mile long march from the Bolivian Amazon to the altiplano in order to personally express their discontent to the President in La Paz (Salgado 2011), some foreign commentators as well as the more radical media outlets like *Pagina Siete* began to give them much greater coverage. In addition, expressions of solidarity and assistance from indigenous representative bodies at the regional and national levels, including the *Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia* (Confederation of Bolivian Indigenous Peoples or CIDOB) and the *Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyu* (National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu or CONAMAQ) provided legitimisation to the claim-making communities. In turn, these factors also converged undermine the empirical credibility of the Morales administration’s indigenous rights discourse.

Finding resonance and cause for concern in the TIPNIS communities' claims against the government, student and activist groups in La Paz came together in a series of open meetings to discuss ways that they could aid and show support for the marchers. One idea that came out of these initial meetings was a series of solidarity marches and demonstrations in the capital. Notably,

...during the first marches, an interesting thing happened. Taking advantage of the massive protective presence of people, some participants, including some of my own friends, started painting. They painted in the road, on walls. They even painted on the wall of the Brazilian embassy to express an opposition to the IIRSA backed project (ST 2011).

He notes that these interventions provided an interesting visual spectacle, which enticed increasing numbers of amateur and professional photographers. Realising that creative visual strategies could provide an exceptionally powerful mobilising tool, both on location in La Paz and via images shared across social media sites, several groups of younger activists resolved to utilise street art as a choice mode of contention.

One of these loose affiliations of young artist-activists, acquired a more concrete shape through activities and experiences coordinated around the *vigilia por el TIPNIS*. The *vigilia* or vigil, took the form of a sit-in initiated by indigenous women from the *altiplano*³⁷ in the *Iglesia de San Francisco* (Church of St Francis) in La Paz. As a show of solidarity, the *vigilia* began on 15 August, the same day as the march and it sought to remain in place until the marchers arrived in the capital. ST claims that at the invitation of the women organisers, he, SG and other young people divided themselves into small groups to stay and sleep there every night. He explains that:

³⁷ Many of these women were associated with CONAMAQ and organised through its networks.

Every day we would make concerts, educational presentations and lead public debates. The idea was to create an open forum where people could get informed and participate in their own way, supporting the TIPNIS march. The vigil, was the place where people could come and give donations, where reporters would come to get information about the progress of the march as it progressed. There were banners created daily and we sought to provide places where kids could come and paint. Along with that that there was plenty of graffiti being created.

Vigilia activities frequently spilled onto the streets, reaching larger and larger crowds of curious and receptive citizens. Displays and talks were put on with the intention of disseminating information about the communities and their legal rights as enshrined in the Constitution. Some participants would stencil messages of support for the marchers around the city centre and in El Alto. These included “*TIPNIS. Carretera = Proyecto Capitalista*” (TIPNIS. Road = capitalist project”). On the façade of El Alto airport, activists used graffiti to liken the MAS government initiatives to those of the Organization of American States (OAS) “*Evo - Mi heroe. Atte:OAS*” and a nearby stencil of a tree with the word “Dignidad” (dignity) imprinted beneath, summarised the plight of the ‘unauthorised indian’. One activist placed banners in the trees of Sopocachi displaying the words “*el TIPNIS muere*” (TIPNIS dies). The sprawling red letters written in free-hand on the large white sheets were deliberately reminiscent of bloodstains and the positioning of the banners in amongst the trees, evoked the idea of the forest as the setting for violence. In this way, the banners worked to frame the highway project as a bringer of death and destruction to the forest and all that dwell there.

The government soon intensified its counter-information or ‘counter-framing’ campaign against the TIPNIS marchers and their broader support network. This involved a range of attempts to undermine the indigenous communities and delegitimise their claims in the eyes of the public. On 21 August 2011, the government created controversy by making public the

telephone records of some of the more prominent rights activists and march organisers. Amongst these government releases were logs of calls received from the United States Embassy, accompanied by the accusation that marchers and NGOs were colluding with Washington in a dastardly plot to debunk Evo Morales. Increasingly, government officials labeled dissenting Indians and their supporters as ‘anti-Bolivian’, or as ‘the puppets of imperialism’ and concerns were expressed within the La Paz vigil over the media’s ability to report impartially on the events surrounding el TIPNIS. Since 2005, the Morales government has taken strides to control media commentary. It backed Bolivia’s first state sponsored newspaper *El Cambio* and increasing numbers of journalists have been prosecuted for libel and *desacato* (or disrespect) when they have engaged in activities critical of the government.³⁸ Additionally, some activists involved with the vigil reported that they had received anonymous threats and been trailed by officials (ST 2012).

In this context, characterised by press censorship and a perceived increase in the possibility of physical danger for those making solo interventions, ST, SG and other vigil participants decided to organise more formally under the title *Insurgencia Comunitaria* (Community Insurgency).

It was important that we continued to counter the government’s line, even in the face of some level of threat. We needed to show to the government that they did not have a monopoly over our cognitions and we wanted to continue to show to the people of La Paz that the marchers deserved our support and not our animosity as the government had suggested (ST 2012).

Believing that street activity had become more important than ever in terms of its role as an alternative source of news and social commentary, they collectively took to the streets of La Paz with aerosol paints and set about displaying a series of slogans, which sought to illustrate

³⁸ For more information on this, see Index (2012) and Medel (2007).

the fallacies and contradictions embodied in government assertions. Examples included: "*El lujo de Evo no es el lujo del Pueblo*" (Evo's luxury is not the luxury of the people). Rather than mentioning the TIPNIS conflict directly, this statement seeks to draw a more general link between MAS economic policies and the persistence of poverty, inequality and social divisions in Bolivia. It thus implies the government's failure to adequately protect vulnerable groups and suggests that the President benefits in material terms whilst others suffer. "*Gobernar obedeciendo a quien?*" (To govern obeying to whom?), provides a direct challenge to Morales' 2005 campaign pledge and to his persistent appeals to the Andean tradition of 'leading by obeying' the community. The question challenged the viewer to think about *whose* interests were driving government policy and *why*. By extension, the group believed these deconstructions would serve to undermine the persuasive power of governmental claims against the TIPNIS marchers and draw support behind the cause.

It is possible to explore the micro-mechanisms and mobilising potential of *Insurgencia Comunitaria* graffiti as a 'contentious performance' a little more closely by allusion to the concept of affect. As noted elsewhere in this dissertation, affect or core affect can be thought of in terms of the body's potential to act, a potential, which may be harnessed by the discursive and/or semiotic framings utilised in politically motivated street art. As Russell (2003:145) notes, "At the heart of emotion, mood and any other emotionally charged event are states experienced as simply feeling good or bad, energised or enervated. These states influence reflexes, perception, cognition and behaviour and are influenced by many causes internal and external, but people have no direct access to these causal connections. Core affect can therefore be experienced as free floating (mood) or can be attributed to some cause (and thereby begin an emotional episode)." In La Paz, where the street remains the most important site of struggle and levels of activity are read as a barometer of (dis)content by politicians and citizens alike (Dangl 2006), a change to the urban visuality can stimulate a



Plate 19: Graffiti around La Paz denounced the TIPNIS road project.



Plate 20: Banners in Sopocachi invoked the notion of the death of the forest.



Plate 21: Slogans appropriated the words of Evo Morales in an ironic fashion, asking “to govern by obeying whom?”

shift in core affect. Notably, after *Insurgencia Comunitaria* decided to organise more formally, their new slogans were deployed systematically and with greater frequency than before. Rather than taking the time to craft and carry around political stencils, the group increasingly opted to write freehand with aerosol paint. The hasty and untidy appearance of these new and increasingly common inscriptions around the streets of La Paz arguably invoked a sense of urgency, such that aspects in medium itself came to serve as a prompt and cue for action. As such, the graffiti not only served to communicate and disseminate a call to action at the discursive level, it also worked in less clearly-rationalised ways, shifting affective states by recourse to the aesthetic.

4.11 Los animales

Another street art producing activist group, which emerged in support of the TIPNIS march was coordinated by NK, who is a trained designer. NK, together with some friends and fellow activists, including ST of *Insurgencia Comunitaria*, made a series of more ‘graphic’ interventions across the cities of La Paz and Cochabamba in preparation for the arrival of the marchers. Unlike *Insurgencia Comunitaria*, NK’s group remained relatively fluid in terms of membership and participation. Activities ranged from small group actions like the dissemination of small wheat-paste³⁹ cutouts around the city to much larger-scale collective interventions like the stenciling action that covered the entire *Plaza Bicentario* on the eve of the Marchers’ arrival in the City.

Early in September 2011, NK’s unnamed collective produced a series of provocative wheat-pastes and distributed them across walls, fences and windows in La Paz. These interventions displayed a simple linear illustration of Evo Morales with a road emerging from his mouth in

³⁹ Wheat-paste is a very simple glue made from flour and water that may be used to stick flyers and posters to all kinds of surfaces. The advantages of wheat-pasting are that paper, flour and glue are all relatively cheap materials and the paste is very simple to mix.

place of his tongue. The motivations behind the *Evo: Carreterra* wheat-pastes or ‘wallpapers’ as NK calls them were described in the following terms:

Our ‘Evo: Road’ image, arose from social and personal frustrations, as a direct response to the lies, deceptions and the government’s arrogant manipulations of what happened in the case of TIPNIS. It is a reply to and [a mode of] support for the 40 day march...I decided to use as a means, the illustration and the wallpaper since I felt that the two are potentially revealing. My idea of Evo’s language [or tongue]⁴⁰ of the road leads the viewer to question the words that our president is expressing... (NK 2012, my translation).

For NK and collaborator CT, casting a road as Evo’s tongue, the muscular organ required for speech, emphasised the true extent of his commitment to the highway project. The solidity, linearity, and density characterising the road/tongue in the image provide a visual rendering of his unyielding ideological support for the mega-project and the relentlessness of verbal attacks on the marchers and their support network. Notably, onlookers in La Paz also likened NK’s road/tongue to a stream of vomit, capturing essentially the same message, that Evo’s espousals were dominated by an unfaltering ideological commitment to a particular vision of progress. “*Evo vomita!*” (Evo vomits!) one lady expressed in amusement, “*Es la verdad!*” (It is the truth!).

As Chaffee (1993) notes, regime response can be a good indicator as to the effectiveness of an intervention. Extra-institutional or underground acts such as the production of street art may be threatening to governments because they may connote a breakdown of order, a prelude to an organised opposition or a challenge to power (ibid.). Almost as soon as NK’s wheat-pastes went up around the city, there was a drive to remove them: “...the government has people who are constantly monitoring protest activity. There were teams who went

⁴⁰ The word ‘*lengua*’ in Spanish may be translated as both ‘tongue’ and ‘language’.

around destroying all manifestations against the government” (NK 2012). This attested to the government’s concerns about the power and possibilities of street art and spurred the production and dissemination of new wheat-paste designs across La Paz and also in Cochabamba. One of these interventions involved a kaleidoscope of fluorescent “toxic butterflies” pasted against a blacked out background. The butterflies, which provide an otherwise attractive burst of colour and implied motion, are in fact marked with skulls imprinted across their wingspans. Not decipherable from a distance, these skulls are deliberately intended to unsettle familiar associations, defy expectations and leave the viewer ill at ease (NK 2012).

On September 25th, the Bolivian police mounted a heavy-handed intercession along the march route, which dispersed marchers, dislocated young children and left some injured. Following media reports of this event and criticisms from Human Rights groups, NK and her fellow collaborators decided that the most immediate priority for their work was to keep support levels up in preparation for the marchers’ arrival and welcome them to the city. As NK explained, on the one hand, she hoped that the group’s collective actions would boost the morale of the marchers who had experienced such a terrifying ordeal. On the other hand, she rationalised that keeping them in the minds and hearts of fellow Bolivians might provide a measure of protection against further state repression. ST from *Insurgencia Comunitaria* was a participant in a large-scale stenciling project co-ordinated by NK which took place the night before the marchers were due to arrive in La Paz. As he explains:

Here we made a “soft” intervention. In the sense that we used “friendly” figures to keep TIPNIS in peoples’ minds and to prepare the city for the march arrival. The project was [NK’s] idea but we all participated in painting the Plaza Bicentenario

and then [NK] and others went on to paint *La cumbre*,⁴¹ where the march first arrived. Something like 10 different animal figures were cut and used.

...We didn't want the intervention in the plaza to shock or to offend, only to gently tease people on the TIPNIS cause, encourage them to think about the place and the nature. The same stencils were used to paint the floor of *La Cumbre* to give the marchers a big welcome as they entered the city. I saw an article saying that the marchers were happy to see that. It was satisfying because this was the aim.

The “friendly” figures he refers to are shown in Plates 24 and 25. NK and collaborators designed and cut stencils that reflected the bio-diversity of the TIPNIS, including river dolphins, parrots, trees, eagles and butterflies. They were sprayed in a range of different colours reminiscent of the *Wiphala*, Bolivia's pan-indigenous and co-official flag, since 2009. ST's comments above are insightful. For him the animal stencils were driven by two fundamental aims: spurring people on the ground to re-imagine their position in relation to the natural environment and expressing solidarity to and with the marchers. His allusion to “friendly” figures is also revealing in terms of the ways in which human communities build and share affect-expectations around objects, entities or other beings and in turn, the way that these expectations may be taken up in contentious performances. ST feels a positive compulsion towards these creatures of the forest and confidently anticipates that others will also be taken by the same imperative.

It is notable that following the police repression and in anticipation of the marchers' arrival, NK and her friends seemed to consciously change tack. They explain that by this point there was a sense of extreme polarisation between pro and anti- highway groups in La Paz. In this context, they believed that antagonistic street art interventions would do little more than ignite further actions against the marchers. The premise behind the animal stencils was thus

⁴¹ This is a reference to the Cumbre Pass, the road used by marchers to enter La Paz.



Plate 22: These wheat-pastes were disseminated in concentrations around La Paz by NK and her fellow activists.

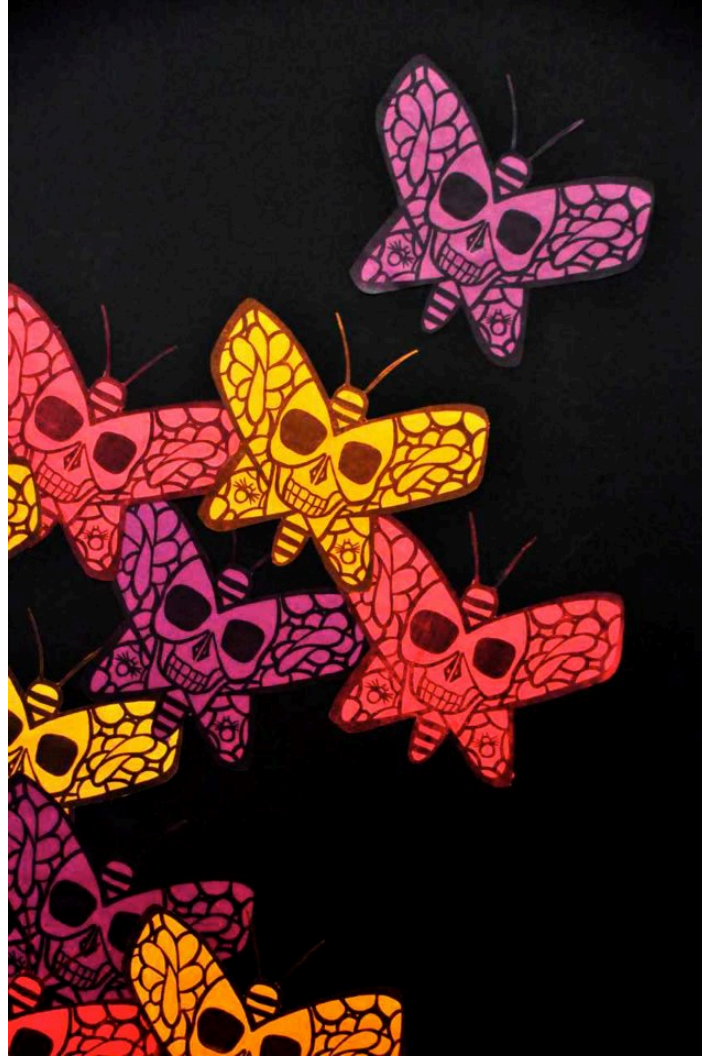


Plate 23: NK's eye-catching 'toxic butterflies' attracted the interest of passers-by in Cochabamba. Decorative and 'harmless' from a distance, the skulls that adorn the butterflies' wings were decipherable as such only when viewed up close.



Plate 24: NK's animal stencils appeared overnight in the Plaza Bicentenario. They represented animals found in the Amazonian reservation and employed the colours of the *wiphala*.



Plate 25: The animal stencils appeared along the Cumbre Pass in the *altiplano* in order to greet the marchers as they approached the city of La Paz.

that they would act as a subtle visual cue, harnessing affect to remind onlookers of the natural beauties of the TIPNIS and boosting the morale of the marchers as they entered the city. Once again, the authorities stepped in quickly to clear the graffiti. The stencils in the Plaza Bicentenario were cleaned up before the arrival of the marchers but notably, in days to follow other activist groups took up the idea of the animal stencils and sought to replace and augment them, locating animal stencils, wheat-pastes and posters on walls and pavements around the city. Without any direct communication between activist groups in regards to the meaning or objectives of the animal stencils, they went viral, arguably forming an affective chain or sequence.

4.12 Three mo(ve)ments in discussion

The background discussion provided in this chapter coupled with closer examinations of the *Círculo 70*, *Mujeres Creando* and interventions in defense of the TIPNIS reserve afford further insights around what street art can do in protest, the conditions under which it emerges, its function as a mirror onto the social, and its psychosocial and transformative possibilities. Referring back to the project's guiding questions, this section draws together these insights to make a stronger case for the suggested revisions, extensions and updates to political process theory.

Charting the emergence and evolution of street art as a contentious performance in Bolivia reveals interesting details about its use and perceived utility under different modes of governance and changing environmental matrices. From the studies presented in this chapter, there is evidence to show that street art has been selected from contentious performance repertoires under various conditions. As evidenced from interviews and source materials on the *Círculo 70*, street art has provided a useful recourse during periods of authoritarianism, where the rule of law is applied arbitrarily. Furthermore, as evidenced by the examples of

Mujeres Creando and interventions in defense of the TIPNIS reserve, it has also been utilised during periods of representational crisis, when democratically elected governments are perceived to have failed to make good on their promises.

Some of the early discourses around the power of art in revolution were shaped heavily by the regional activities of the Mexican muralists. The Bolivian mural artists who emerged in celebration of the 1952 National Revolution were directly influenced by both the political and stylistic practices of Siquieros and Orozco. However, the muralism of the National Revolution was premised on an ideology of national assimilation, which granted new civil and political recognitions to Indians but denied indigenous history and cultural practice, essentially feeding into the protracted subjugation of Bolivia's majority ethnic group. The patterns of exclusion, assimilation and articulation of the country's indigenous majority are certainly well-indicated in the themes, omissions and commissions of political street art.

On the whole, in Bolivia the medium of political street art has tended to emerge in greater concentrations and with greater stylistic sophistication when the penalties and physical risks associated with discovery have been low. It is possible to speak of several discernable escalations of street art activity in twentieth century and early twenty-first century Bolivia. These interventions broadly follow key (formal) democratising steps. The first of these escalations occurred around the time of the National Revolution; the second occurred around the transition to democracy from 1982 and the third occurred with the ascendancy and election of Bolivia's first indigenous president, Evo Morales.

In the case of the 'social painters', who led the charge to create murals following the Revolution, street art activity was largely in line with government ideology and was facilitated greatly by official sanctioning. Possibilities for expression and claim-making through street art were stymied by the staging of the military coup in 1971 as oppositional

political practices were met with strong repression. Following the formal democratic transition, the articulations that appeared were overwhelmingly those of contending political elites and commercial advertisers, leading artist-activists *Mujeres Creando* to appropriate the medium in order to stage their own creative interventions. *Mujeres Creando* certainly set a precedent and as the impact of neoliberal cuts and privatisations were felt in the 1990's, their graphic interventions were joined by a multiplicity of other actors.

Further escalation occurred with the ascendancy of MAS, bringing more indigenous expressions to the fore. Yet, MAS government discourses and actions have more recently come under scrutiny as their internal contradictions have been realised. Resultantly, the government has itself increasingly become the target of critical commentary and intervention through the medium of street art.

By contrast, during the period of authoritarian government under Hugo Banzer, the use of street art by those active in association with the *Circulo 70* certainly tended more towards infrapolitics; veiled or anonymous modes which served to disrupt the projected governmental visibility but at the same time allowed a level of protection to dissidents. Whilst articulations occurred and served important functions, they were less frequent, less concentrated and they were often less sophisticated in stylistic terms- the more time-consuming the intervention, the greater the risk of discovery and arrest.

In address to the question of what street art can do in protest, all three studies are illuminating. In its more surreptitious forms, exemplified by activists associated with the *Circulo 70*, it served to facilitate mobilisation and incubate new oppositional currents. Meanwhile, in the cases of *Mujeres Creando* and the TIPNIS vigil, street art was put to work as a means of direct confrontation with the government, a method by which to disseminate information to the public and define a territory. The studies also suggest that political street

art has served a strategic function where it has been deployed to frame and counter frame; as words and images have been deliberately composed to organise experience, support or dismantle emergent or established discourses. In the case of Illanes' Warisata murals, street art served a didactic and emancipatory function; demonstrating visually the customs and values of Tiwanaku that should be preserved by the young Indian audience, in order to attain access to a better future. By contrast, *Insurgencia Comunitaria* have often utilised their interventions to counter-frame the government, invalidate its rhetorical claims and create space for the expression of marginalised narratives. Quite importantly, street art functions as a framing or counter-framing device by invoking, shifting and harnessing felt bodily intensities. In the case of the NK's interventions, which range from 'sinister butterflies' to 'friendly forest creatures' there is a deliberate move to transform the senses. The butterflies constitute an example of a visual stimulus that plays with and unsettles familiar codes and assumptions.

Moreover, as suggested in the introductory chapters, sometimes street art interventions can quite literally shock social actors out of their ingrained modes of behaviour, moving them to act in novel and non-rationalised ways. Almost paradoxically, this observation about what street art can do at the level of sensate experience seems to be paramount to the strategic intent of *Mujeres Creando* who describe their interventions as something beyond the didactic and contrary to marketised abstract art. Interestingly, the anarcha-feminists seek to have their creative endeavours 'conquer words', to defy the discursively accessible and encourage onlookers to think anew and to think critically, for themselves. To this extent, their art has an extremely important transformative and psychosocial dimension, encouraging social actors to assess their own biases and re-think the stereotypes and social bonds prevalent in contemporary Bolivia.

CHAPTER 5

Insights from the Southern Cone: Argentine Street Art in Contention

Argentina is a land of imposing mountains, magnificent glaciers, unforgiving deserts and fertile lowland regions. It combines topographical and geological diversity with relative racial homogeneity. As Nouzeilles and Montaldo (2002) so rightly suggest, in the case of Argentina's political and social history there are many possible beginnings at hand, each as credible as the next. Once described by Jorge Luis Borges as 'a land of exiles' (ibid) and at one time thought to be home to mountains of silver surpassing the reserves of Upper Peru (ibid.), this expansive country has a turbulent past. Power struggles and recurrent financial crises may be chronicled alongside more egregious episodes of violence and bloodshed. Of the country studies presented in this dissertation, Argentina stands out as the most articulated in its production of politically committed street art both historically and arguably also in the present day. Writing two decades ago, Chaffee's observations support this view. He claims that: "[p]robably in no Latin American country have graffiti, posters, and wallpaintings constituted such a popular expression as in Argentina" (Chaffee 1993:101). Chaffee also maps the evolution of street art and suggests that it has been deeply intertwined with the development of the Argentine state and national consciousness since the turn of the twentieth century. This is a story, which is recounted, extended and rather importantly updated in this chapter to include popular expressions, stylistic developments and 'street art events' that have gone unrecorded.

Having first provided a sense of context which situates political street art as an intervention with its own developmental story, the chapter then proceeds to explore in somewhat greater

depth, the contingencies and affective encounters surrounding three large-scale outpourings of street art or street-art events which have occurred in and around the city of Buenos Aires. These are the *Tucumán Arde* intervention of 1968; the ‘*siluetazo*’ of 1983 and the hyper-articulation through political stencils that accompanied the 2001 financial crisis. Based around images, documentation, testimonies and interviews with artist-activists, the chapter seeks to uncover some of the motivations and conditions facilitating the use of street art as a contentious performance. It also sheds light on the expressive, heuristic and communicative functions or outcomes of political street art production.

5.1 La edad de oro (The golden age) and embryonic articulations

Political street art documentation in ‘the Paris of the South’ begins towards the end of Argentina’s ‘golden age’. During the period lasting roughly from 1870- 1930, Argentina emerged to become a largely united, nominally democratic yet extremely prosperous and culturally acclaimed nation; its wealth surpassing that of Spain, Switzerland and Sweden by 1920. Growth and stability during this period were fuelled by a variety of political and economic developments, including a relative decline in inter-state political rivalries and the disbanding of the state militias under General Roca. Following the relaxation of immigration controls, educated and highly skilled migrant workers entered in their thousands from Europe, providing for the expansion of the middle class and the revitalisation of agriculture. Encroachments into Patagonia and the Pampas opened up new lands for settlement and farming. The cattle industry also expanded as refrigeration techniques allowed Argentine ranchers to begin exporting high quality, frozen or chilled beef to Europe in the 1890s (Nouzeilles and Montaldo 2002).

As the migrant cultures merged with those of the *porteños*,⁴² the popular creative enterprise of *filete porteño* emerged in Buenos Aires. *Filete porteño* is a decorative mode of painting, incorporating bright colours, a high degree of symmetry, intricate floral bordering, common motifs such as the acanthus leaf and gothic script. Although the *fileteado* style is now widely recognizable and has been used to adorn all kinds of objects from shop signs to *colectivos*⁴³ to coca-cola bottles, it originated as a means of embellishing horse drawn carts in the 1890s and is said to have been first developed by Italian migrants employed in the manufacture of the vehicles (Genovese 2001/13; 2007; 2008).

Stylistically, the *filete* patterning is a hybrid, strongly reminiscent of the highly decorated Roma caravans which entered use in Europe around the middle of the nineteenth century. However, design elements from Italian glassware production have been noted as influences, in addition to the eventual incorporation of popular Argentine figures and the image of tango. As technological advances in modes of transportation came, *filete* adapted in tow; emerging on the trucks and privately owned buses that came to replace horse-drawn carts in the industrialising port-capital of Buenos Aires (Genovese 2007). Therefore, although not a direct statement of political allegiance or protestation, the *filete* practice, in its evolution can be seen as an expression of the emergent *porteño* identity; a living street-based art and a means of negotiating amongst a range of competing aesthetic influences in an expanding multi-cultural society.

The massive influx of educated and self-affirmed migrants from Western Europe brought pressure for a more inclusive and representative aesthetic, evident in the *filete*. Notably however, it also brought pressure for a more open political system. The *Partido Autonomista Nacional* (National Autonomist Party or PAN) dominated Argentine politics throughout the

⁴² The term *porteño* refers to an inhabitant of the port city of Buenos Aires.

⁴³ *Colectivo* is an abbreviated noun from '*vehículos de transporte colectivo*' (vehicles for collective transportation). It is a term used in Argentina, Uruguay and Southern Chile, to refer to buses.

golden period, although rival parties emerged to challenge what they perceived to be elitist posturing and attempts to block the emergence of competitors. It was in opposition to the PAN that politically engaged street art emerged as a party-political tool. At the turn of the century, the *Partido Socialista de Argentina* (Socialist party of Argentina) became the first political party to bring posters into their campaign repertoire. The Socialists ran candidates for National Congress in 1896, publishing 20,000 copies of their manifesto as handbills, which were disseminated throughout the city, and pasting up to 8,000 posters around public spaces in Buenos Aires (Chaffee 1993).

After significant electoral reforms in 1912, the political system granted a platform to a range of political challengers (Alston and Gallo 2005). The *Partido Socialista*, the *Unión Cívica Radical*, UCR (the Radical Civil Union or UCR) and the *Partido Demócrata Progresista* (Party of Democratic Progressives or PDP) emerged as contenders for control of the province of Buenos Aires, all utilising colourful lithograph posters, which usually displayed the party's logo and representative colours. Chaffee (1993) notes that in 1919, Radical Party leader and *padre de los pobres* (father of the poor) Hipolito Yrigoyen pushed the capacity of this new mass medium even further by including a printed photograph of himself on handbills and posters. This was an unprecedented and largely unanticipated move, particularly given that Yrigoyen was widely considered to be a rather un-photogenic man, garnering the popular nickname of *el peludo* (the hairy armadillo) (Blanco 2007). However, the move can be seen in terms that fit strategically with the populist campaign model. Cammack (2000) suggests that populist politics emerged in Latin America around the time of the Great Depression, as a number of charismatic, personalistic leaders appealed to broader society for support; utilising nationalistic, anti-status quo ideological framings as well as a range of patronage options. Yrigoyen, in particular, sought to project an image of himself as the vanguard of the poor and labouring classes in Argentina. The dissemination of his photograph made him visually

accessible and newly recognizable to these groups, who often lacked consistent access to print media. Moreover, Yrigoyen's weathered and surly appearance defied attempts to frame him as a pampered and privileged political elite, lending his own populist discourse and vanguardist appeal greater credibility as compared with his competitors.

In 1928, Yrigoyen's Radical Party achieved its second round in office (the first occurring between 1916 to 1922). By this point in time, Radical Party posters had become quite sophisticated in their use of rich and varied colours, illustrations and witty slogans. As indicated in the introduction to this thesis, the combination of visual and textual tools in the campaign poster can be variously informative, directive, enriching and/or complicating. Chaffee (1993) refers to one campaign poster, which showed a giant locomotive sweeping down a track and read "Nothing will stop its advance". Chaffee argues that the progressing locomotive, coupled with this slogan was mobilised by the Party as a symbol of the government's expeditious drive for industrialisation; an effort to invoke national unity and pride around developmental progress. Contrary to the indications of the poster however, it is widely claimed that by the time of his second round at government, Yrigoyen was elderly and bordering on senility. Public funds were often dispersed in a reckless manner and secretiveness, even paranoia characterised the President's decision-making processes. Restlessness and dissatisfaction amongst organised labour, the Church and military groups resulted, and with the wake of the Great Depression, there were moves to forcibly oust Yrigoyen, whose rhetorical claims had failed to live up to empirical scrutiny.

5.2 Developments and contingencies in the 'infamous decade'

The period from the 1930's began with a military coup in which Yrigoyen was removed from government and placed under house arrest. The subsequent chain of events brought Juan Perón, a populist military colonel into power and evidenced the mobilisation of street art as

an important tool of class struggle. This section expands on the evolving relationship between class politics and political street art in Argentina during ‘the infamous decade’, citing the relevant interjections of the Mexican muralist David Siqueiros during the 1930’s as well as the emergent and evolving relationship between Peronist popular politics and visual tools.

Although the preceding period was characterised by increasing disenchantment and jockeying from various segments of society, the 1930 coup itself involved very few people. The *saboteurs* consisted of a group of young cadets and officers led by General José Uriburu. Amongst these young cadets was Juan Domingo Perón. Notably, leafleting by airplane was undertaken in order to communicate the outcome of the coup d’état to a population dispersed widely across the state territory. General Uriburu ruled by decree and employed torture, and imprisonment against his detractors. He cancelled elections in 1931 in order to extend his rule and suppress the Radical Party, but was also hugely unpopular amongst his own ranks. Civilian and troop uprisings forced him to hold presidential elections in 1932, during which he was replaced by General Agustín Justo, whose supporters, allied in the *Concordancia* [Concordance],⁴⁴ promoted a conservative restoration that sought to return Argentina to its earlier days of growth and a controlled democratic transition (Cavarozzi 1992).

In fact, Justo did not get very far with either aim. He moved to dismiss Congress, censor the press, purge the universities as well as declare a state of siege. Sequential military and *Concordancia* governments followed, suppressing labour groups and building preferential trade arrangements with the Great Britain, whilst the purchasing power parity of Argentine workers declined and local competitors were crowded out of contracts. At this time, many workers took to the streets in protest and, as evidenced in Brazil too, painting political

⁴⁴ The *Concordancia* emerged as a political alliance between wealthy, conservative factions in Argentine politics. Agricultural and oil interests predominated amongst those allied. Three Presidents belonging to the Concordancia (Agustín Justo, Roberto Ortiz, and Ramón Castillo attained power during “the infamous decade” between 1931 and 1943 (Cavarozzi 1992).

commentaries with the medium of tar became a popular recourse and intervention for resource-poor claim-makers (Kozak 2011).

In 1933 the Mexican muralist and political activist David Siqueiros was invited to give a series of three lectures at *la Asociacion Amigos del Arte* [the Association of the Friends of Art] in Buenos Aires (Betta 2006) by Victoria Ocampo, described as “the first lady of letters” (Stein 1994:87). The first two of these lectures urged Argentines to take their art to the street in order to awaken and provoke a socialist consciousness; in order to free creativity from the auspices of dry academicism and elite gallery circuits:

Come out of the placid shadows of the atelier and Montparnassian schools to walk the full light of human and social realities of the factories, the streets, in the working class neighborhoods, roads and huge field with its farms and ranches (Siqueiros 1933 cited by Batta 2003, my translation)

Siqueiros and his companion Blanca Luz were concerned by the increasingly fascist direction of political life in Buenos Aires. They rallied artists to side with the proletariat and the victimised more generally:

The street spectator is distinct from the complacent gallery spectator. One has to put the painting that will be seen from afar by their eyes in such a way that the intensity of the theme and the plastic expression will be seen, will be felt. It is not possible to effect this fundamental change in painting without there being an ideological incitement. Still more: it is not possible to realize anything great without a spiritual content that encourages and strengthens this desire. We should understand that we should be tied to the grave problems of our epoch. We should lean towards the worker; we should be on the side of the weak nation pillaged by the stronger, we should hate war and aspire that artists and intellectuals enjoy greater appreciation. Art without ideological content has no reason for being and has no permanence. (Siqueiros 1933, cited and translated by Stein 1994:87)

Siqueiros' ideas had a popular uptake amongst the intellectual and artistic community in Buenos Aires. One inspired group petitioned General Justo to allow the Mexican artist-activist to paint an outdoor mural in the City. Whilst the idea was initially approved by Justo, Siqueiros' speeches and ideological persuasions had angered much of the political right. The newspapers '*Frontera*', '*Cristol*' and '*Bandera Argentina*' launched a vicious textual attack on his work, creating pressure for the president to withdraw his approval (Stein 1994). Additionally, having become increasingly concerned over her own place and standing in Argentine society, Ocampo cancelled the final lecture at the *Asociacion Amigos del Arte*. A political drive to get Siqueiros out of the country ensued (Betta 2006).

Before the artist-activist was finally forcibly deported in December 1933, he engaged with a range of activists outside of the Argentine intelligentsia. As Claudia Kozak explains:

Stencils began to be used in the 1930's. There exists a testimony about Siqueiros' visit in the 1930's. He was a part of the Communist movement and he taught the groups here in Buenos Aires how to make political stencils. Before this they had painted political paintings with tar, which was problematic because the medium was dirty and would make a mess when the rains came. Siqueiros wrote in his memoirs about teaching these protestors how to communicate using regular masonry paint instead. The interesting thing is that Siqueiros said he used stencils. Prior to this stencils had been used only as a mechanistic process for creating textile and wallpaper prints (Kozak 2011).

Siqueiros' testimony evidences the earliest recorded mention of the use of the political stencil in Argentina and most interestingly, identifies its uptake with regional influences. The contingency and importance of this development is well-indicated in the sections that follow, which reveal the political stencil to constitute a refrain in Argentine articulations; serving as a

crucial vehicle of expression and communication in the years immediately to follow as well as, into the twenty-first century.

5.3 Political street art and *Peronismo*: a marriage of convenience

Juan Domingo Perón, became Argentina's Minister for Labour in 1943 and in this role, he sought to cultivate a strong relationship between the ministry and the trade unions and workers syndicates; a relationship that had been thoroughly wrecked by years of military and *Concordancia* initiatives. Loyalty among a popular base of working-class adherents grew and expressions in favour of Perón's methods and against the fascist tendencies of the military government began to emerge on the streets. When Perón was forced to resign and subsequently imprisoned by the military government, a wave of trade union and workers protests erupted including mass demonstrations led by the *Confederación General del Trabajo de la República Argentina* (General Confederation of Labour of the Argentine Republic or CGT) and Perón's then romantic partner, a radio star named Eva Duarte. 'Evita',⁴⁵ as she became known, began campaigning alongside Perón, boosting his position with women's groups in particular, many of whom came to express an appreciation for this woman who advocated for women's civil and political rights in fora dominated largely by men.

By the time that the military stepped aside in 1946, Perón [together with then wife Evita] had attained an unparalleled level of popularity and became an obvious candidate for the presidency (Chaffee 1993). A large network of support built up around Perón and Evita and this was echoed on the streets in political stenciling and fly-posting by labour groups. Aware of their own declining favour with the public, many of the traditional parties banded together to form an unlikely political alliance. This alliance, named the Democratic Union consisted of

⁴⁵ *Evita* is the diminutive form of the name Eva, meaning 'little Eva'.

the UCR, Socialist Party, Communist Party and the PAN. It nominated UCR congressmen José Tamborini and Enrique Mosca, as presidential candidates.

During the election campaign Perón came under heavy criticism for his declaration of neutrality regarding the war. The United States strongly opposed his election, regarding his position as ‘pro-fascist’. The then US ambassador to Argentina, Spruille Braden, who had been publicly critical of Perón, arranged US sponsorship for the political opposition during the 1946 elections. In direct response, Perón’s supporters produced a range of handbills and posters, which were then distributed across Buenos Aires. These interventions described the ambassador as “the Al Capone of Buenos Aires”, likening his attempt to manipulate the course of domestic politics to the actions of the infamous American gangster and racketeer. Two weeks before the elections, the US State Department further conspired to discredit Perón by making public the ‘Blue Book’, a document detailing Argentina’s and more especially Perón’s dealings with the Axis powers.

However, rather than undermine Perón in the public eye, US interference ironically served to bolster his popularity. Popularising the phrase “*Braden o Perón*” (Braden or Perón), Perón himself successfully invoked latent anti-imperialist sentiments against his political competitors. The obvious implication here was that a vote for the opposition would be a vote for rule by the Americans. These sentiments came to the fore when the Democratic Union, backed by Braden, produced a poster depicting a graphic of the figure of Perón holding up a white workers t-shirt as a flag. The image was accompanied by the slogan, “The Sweaty One- the new colours of the fatherland”. Intended to draw on bourgeois discomforts about Perón’s tight associations with the working class and to invoke ‘disgust’, the poster’s theme was in fact appropriated and inverted by Perón’s supporting demographic. Following a fortnight of incarceration on an island outside Buenos Aires in late 1945, Perón emerged in front of

crowds, proclaiming that he wished only to “mix with this sweating mass as a simple citizen!” (Perón 1945 cited by Favor 2010:55). Workers turned the image of the sweaty Perón into a popular symbol, adopting the label “*los descamisados*” (the shirtless ones), with pride.

Here it is possible to get an indication of some of the contingencies involved with the generation and function of a successful collective action frame; the cognitive and visceral elements that combine to invoke resonance. On the one hand, it is necessary for affective intensity to be transferred across bodies or groups of bodies and coded in a broadly consistent way. On the other, some empirical validation of the discursive transmission is required for audiences to ‘believe in’ what they are being told. In the case of the Democratic Union poster mentioned, the energy or intensity registered, coded and discursively transmitted as ‘disgust’ by Braden’s affiliates was not so-registered by the wider Argentine populace, much of which could identify directly with the experience of physical exertion in the course of daily life. Contact with the image was therefore more likely to be coded by the majority, in terms of elite hostility towards the poor and working classes.

There may be further dynamics at play too. As Ahmed (2010) argues, registers of intensity do not occur in a vacuum and their coding may well depend on prior affective encounters under similar circumstances. It may be that an American voice has in the past invoked anger for some ill-deed. Future encounters with American voices may thus be marred by inexplicable feelings of disquiet, even hostility. In this instance, indeed in all instances, the body does not arrive at the scene in a neutral gear. Rather the American voice is perceived as an affective source or feeling- cause (ibid.).

Perón embarked on his presidential mission with a 5 step plan for industrialisation, based on import-substitution to minimise Argentina’s vulnerability to outside shocks and imperial incursions, as well as large-scale welfare reforms that would redistribute rent more equitably

amongst the economy's productive groups. Resultantly, the British owned railway was nationalised, workers' remunerations were increased, free healthcare and education to university level were introduced. Additionally, hospitals, care homes, orphanages and schools as well as other places of refuge for the poor, sickly and dispossessed were planned and built, often under the auspices of the Eva Perón Foundation (Romero 2002).

Importantly Chaffee (1993:105) highlights that "Under Perón, street art and public events were elevated to a high symbolic level to demonstrate grass roots appeal...The government became a key producer of posters" and teams were mobilised by the Sub-Secretariat of Information and Press to issue a broad range of pro-Perón ephemera, including posters, placards, picture books for children, pamphlets, as well as brochures, postcards and photos of the presidential couple. Foss (2000) claims that between 1949 and mid-1951, the Sub-Secretariat produced 33 million individual items, enough to reach every man, woman and child in Argentina twice over. He highlights that most of these materials were distributed for free, an attempt to keep the Peróns and their 'good deeds' highly visible across the country.

The labour unions and other working class *militants*,⁴⁶ which became state-appendages under the new system, also produced posters. Common themes here also included social justice, nationalism and praise for Perón's initiatives. Chaffee (1993) describes some of these posters and highlights some of their most common linguistic and visual refrains. When Perón nationalised the British railroads, gigantic posters were produced to celebrate, "*Ahora nos pertenecen*" (Now they are ours). Others projected messages of entitlement and support: "The land belongs to those who work it", "Perón keeps his word, Evita dignifies it" (Chaffee 1993:105) At the community level, there also emerged the *Partido Justicialista* (Justice Party or PJ) street brigades who would use stencils as well as their own recognizable style of

⁴⁶ In Spanish, the term *militante* indicates a committed member of a political organization, party or movement. Its usage differs from that of 'militant' in English, carrying none of the connotations of violence and radicalism usually associated with the English term.

graphic text to promote the Peróns' projects and personas (Kozak 2011). Evita for example became the symbol for women's political participation and essentially the popular face of the PJ; her popularity was echoed in the reams of handbills and posters that displayed her film-star portrait and even rudimentary stencils of her face appeared on the streets.

Essentially, political graffiti in Argentina had its origins in class politics and was directly linked to the political evolution of the workers and the dynamics of their popular culture during the transition to Peronism. Graffiti [was] a symbol of class politics, an expression of political will evolving out of the opposition and protests of the working class against the dominant political elite and their culture". (Chaffee 1993:104)

However, alongside these street-based initiatives, there was a simultaneous process afoot in which the conventional forms of media and opposition material became heavily circumscribed. It has been widely argued that from his inauguration in 1946, Perón developed his regime in ways that tended towards an authoritarian corporatism. Dissolving and reconfiguring all of the organisations that had supported him during his election campaign, Perón moved to create a hierarchically organised mass party system that would marginalize opposition forces (Lewis 2006). He removed Supreme Court justices and replaced them with individuals whose ideological and moral lines were drawn close to his own. Over half of the country's university professors were replaced by government appointments and political activity was forbidden on the university campuses.

To supplement these measures, Perón also sought to control the airwaves, his forces intimidated the print media and he had the police clamp down on the production of underground newspapers, pamphlets, posters and political stencils (Lewis 2006). Aided by loans and the assistance of influential friends, Evita purchased a range of radio networks and magazines, as well as the popular newspaper '*Democracia*', which subsequently became the

mouthpiece for the regime in its operations of power. In March 1949, Perón created a new constitution permitting the president to succeed himself (Lewis 2006). For a short while it was expected that Juan and Evita would run on the same ticket for the 1951 elections. Pro-system wall-paintings and posters echoed the expectation “*Perón-Perón 1952-58*”. However this did not come to pass as Evita, suffering from cervical cancer, declined the nomination for vice-president. She died in July 1952, casting a dark cloud over her many admirers in the Peronist movement.

5.4 Peronismo and political street art: from anti-system to pro-system

Retrospectively it is easy to observe the Peronist movement’s evolution over time from a popular, anti-system mobilisation to an oppressive, pro-system structure. Although Perón was re-elected to the presidency in 1951 with two thirds of the popular vote, electoral conditions featured intimidation tactics, media censorship and the risk of arrest for ‘disrespect’ (Lewis 2006). Juan Perón’s popularity diminished after the death of his second wife Evita and he was increasingly the subject of criticism. The Church, military, opposition politicians and even some of his own cherished proletariat support based began to move against him. The Church had originally supported his ascendancy to power. However, as Romero (2002:108) points out, critical voices emerged from different quarters within the Church hierarchy:

An important group of ecclesiastics—among them Monsignor Miguel D’Andrea—concerned about the growing authoritarianism, firmly aligned with the opposition. Others lamented Perón’s later abandonment of nationalist positions, and many more looked on some aspects of the democratizing effects of the new social relations with reservations, for example, creating equal rights for “natural” and “legitimate” offspring.

In 1954 a group of Catholic politicians founded a rival political party premised on Christian Democratic values. Subsequently, the Church started organising its own labor union. Feeling

threatened by the encroachment, Perón attempted to clamp down on the Church's activities, imprisoning priests, closing Catholic newspapers and prohibiting religious processions. In response, some church groups began to produce and widely disseminate underground fliers suggesting that voters would need to make the choice between "Christ or Perón", implying that the General was working against the word of God. This was of course a hugely inflammatory and damning statement to make in a society so strongly driven by Catholic beliefs.

These indictments were accompanied by worsening economic woes. As Romero (2002:119) explains:

The favourable international conjuncture in which the Peronist state emerged began to change around 1949 when the prices of grains and meat returned to normal and the markets shrank, while the accumulated reserves, spent with little foresight, were exhausted. The situation was serious, because the development of industry, perhaps paradoxically, made the country more dependent on imports: fuels, intermediate goods such as steel and paper, parts and machinery whose scarcity hindered industry's growth and ultimately provoked inflation, unemployment, and strikes. The first signs of the crisis consequently brought the fall of the minister of the economy, Miguel Miranda, who was replaced by a team of professional economists—headed by Alfredo Gomez Morales—which took charge of implementing austerity measures. Three years later, the measures did not prevent the re-appearance of the crisis in foreign trade, aggravated by two successive droughts. In the harsh winter of 1952 people were forced to eat black bread, made with millet, while there was a shortage of meat, and electric power failures were frequent.

Labour groups became increasingly disgruntled by austerity measures introduced to help quell the growing imbalance between export revenue and import costs and turned towards opposition parties for support. The government's other principal supporter, the military,

became increasingly restless and in 1955, Perón was overthrown in a *coup d'état* that cost 350 civilian lives and promptly exiled.

Interestingly, the new regime, led by general Eduardo Lonardi initially resolved to establish and sustain a balance between the competing interests of the heterogeneous groups who had expressed dissatisfaction with Perón. They did not resort to the use of force. As Romero (2002:131) explains, “Surrounded by Catholic groups—the most active but also newcomers to the opposition— and by nationalist military figures, the leader of the *Revolución Libertadora* (Liberating Revolution) proclaimed that there would be “neither victors nor vanquished” and sought to find common ground among the principal forces that had backed Perón, particularly the unions.” In Lonardi’s view, there was in fact great merit in the nationalist and populist movement that Perón had nurtured, provided that the corrupt elements and potential agitators could be brought under control. On the whole, “The unions showed themselves to be conciliatory with the new government, though in many working-class quarters—in Avellaneda, Berisso, and Rosario—there were spontaneous demonstrations against the military” (ibid.)

Levitsky (2003) writes that in the post-1955 era, Peronism lacked the hierarchical, centralised organisation of the previous epoch. In fact, he claims that it more closely approximated a movement organisation, with a range of very loosely associated groups operating with varying degrees of autonomy from the national leadership. Sometimes even Perón’s direct orders were disregarded (ibid.). In this period, the Peronists were forced back into an anti-systemic position and Chaffee observes that street art thus “grew in importance as a medium against the military’s attempt to purge the Peronist movement”. Notably, Lonardi’s relatively gradual approach to ‘de-peronisation’ angered military hardliners and outward oriented business groups and he was removed after just two months. His replacement, Lieutenant-

General Pedro Aramburu, took a much more forthright approach to the Peronists; immediately moving to proscribe associations with and visual symbols of the movement as well as issuing a decree that outlawed the mere mention of Juan Perón's name in public. Chaffee (1993:106) relays that, “following the decree, “Peronist unions were intervened, their leadership purged. Unable to engage in electoral political activity the workers returned to the streets to assert their symbolic power”. With penalties for Peronist association increasing all the while, graffiti was used across Buenos Aires to announce local strikes, general strikes, demonstrations as well as to celebrate the imprisoned; exiled and endangered. “*Perón vive*” was a common articulation.

During the 1955-1972 period, a bloc of Peronist unions, the 62 *Organisaciones* formed a movement called *La Resistencia* (The Resistance) who made great use of underground, anti-system street graphics. Levitsky (2003) describes the graffiti groups, which began to operate under the cover of darkness, appropriating public spaces with Peronist symbolism and slogans in order to maintain an active visual presence on the street and project a sense of the strength and continued mobilisation of the movement in the face of its proscription:

The movement survived within the trade unions, which remained legal and despite the best efforts of the military regime, overwhelmingly Peronist. Peronists also operated out of thousands of clandestine neighbourhood-based networks, or ‘working groups’, many of which met secretly under the guise of barbeques or birthday parties. These clandestine networks organized study groups, midnight graffiti-painting brigades, masses for Evita, the circulation of Perón’s messages, and literature distribution at dance halls and soccer games. These activities were crucial to the movement’s post-1955 survival (Levitsky 2003:41-42)

Chaffee (1993) claims that from 1955, the political swings between authoritarian and civilian governments engendered accompanying cycles in the style and content of political street art.

During times of authoritarian rule, underground street graphics advertised the fact that an active opposition persisted. During the (proto-) democratic interludes, graffiti was often supplemented by more sophisticated wall-paintings and elaborate large scale posters, which were indicative of the relaxation in censorship and repressive measures against opposition groups. Simultaneously, during these proto-democratic interludes, steps were taken to bolster the nation's cultural capital. In 1958, the *Instituto di Tella* (di Tella Institute) was founded by the Torcuato di Tella industrial family. The Institute was intended as a centre for social and artistic research, drawing a clear link between the aesthetic and the socio-political. Two years later, the *Asociacion Ver y Estimar* launched an annual competition for emerging artists and in the coming years international-artistic links were forged through the French Embassy and the activities of art critic Jorge Anibal Romero Brest. Creative expression and socio-political critique were facilitated in the emergence of these new artistic and intellectual circuits.

In 1964, Perón hinted that he would return from exile during a non-military regime period. The Peronist *Resistencia* began to plaster the walls with stencils and freehand inscriptions which exclaimed "*Perón vuelve!*" [Perón returns!]. However, Perón was prevented from entering the country by the military. Notably In 1963/4, the unions also launched their "Battle Plan", which aimed to pressure the government to pursue economic policies more favourable to the workers and remove restrictions on Peronist political activities. "The unions carried out work stoppages, seized factories and scrawled graffiti on them symbolically as liberated zones" (Chaffee 1993:107). The anti-system influences gained strength and growing discontent with the military led to an increase in support for the Peronists and a swell in the ideological left.

5.5 Political purges, artistic rebellion and the peoples' spring(s) of '68

Political upheaval characterised the period that followed, as national and international events combined in ways that gave purpose to and encouragement for higher levels of activism against the increasingly repressive measures instituted by Juan Carlos Onganía. Particularly notable were the events around the *Tucumán Arde* intervention of 1968, which is discussed in the section that follows. *Tucumán Arde* was the initiative of artists, journalists and sociologists from Rosario and Buenos Aires who sought to return art to the realm of politics where they believed it would be put to its best use. Key visual confrontations took place in the provinces of Tucumán and Buenos Aires shortly prior to the *Rosariazo* and *Córdobazo* eruptions of 1969. As Chaffee notes, “There emerged from these confrontations a reinvigorated Peronist movement, a new left and a guerilla underground that raised the emotional level of politics, the process of which culminated with the dirty war” (Chaffee 1993:108)

Whilst they had grown in strength and visibility, the Peronist factions still lacked the support of the all-important student groups and the middle classes. Things changed after 1966 when yet another military coup brought Juan Carlos Onganía to power. Onganía was well-known as an admirer of the Spanish dictator Franco. After his inauguration, he almost immediately declared his intentions to remain in power indefinitely and pursued a program geared toward moral, political and economic revitalisation, the primary aim of which was the eradication of communism. Where two decades prior, Perón had managed to alienate students and intellectuals when he expelled thousands of professors and students from the universities; Onganía's imperative was even more decisive. He took to purging academic, cultural and labour bodies and expressed his outright opposition to both organisations linked to communism and to liberal democracy.

According to Chaffee (1993:107) Onganía “...banned all sociopolitical activity. He intervened in the national universities using strong armed police tactics to expel students and professors suspected of ‘communist’ sympathies, and he crushed the general strike called by the CGT”. The University of Buenos Aires and di Tella Institute were amongst those targeted. During *La Noche de los Bastones Largos* (The Night of the Long Batons), five faculties of UBA participating in a sit-in/occupation were forcibly dislodged by armed police. Students and staff were beaten and many were detained before being exiled. Onganía’s assault on the aspirations and rights of students, intellectuals, workers and others led a great many to feel that they had no choice but to turn to the strongest and most vocal anti-system mobilisation: the Peronists.

Notably, “Anti-system street art dogged Onganía from the start” (Chaffee 1993:108). Despite his attempts to circumscribe ‘undesirable’ political associations, Peronist networks now expanded and their increasingly diverse composition, lack of centralisation and informality made them hard to put down. Chaffee claims that the government found itself unable to suppress the politico-artistic expressions, which popped up at an unprecedented rate. A common refrain in the posters, stencils and graffiti inscriptions was remembrance. The names of students who had been killed in clashes with the authorities were often invoked as epitaphs and indictments of government brutality (ibid.). Chaffee (1993) describes one occasion in 1966, when a student was killed during a demonstration in Córdoba. He describes how posters with photographs were plastered around the zone where he was killed; street signs were covered over and newly painted signage renamed the street after him. In this instance, the task of designating the street was appropriated from the state in dedication to the departed youth and the street’s appearance was deliberately intervened to provide a caveat to the government; reminding them that power and sovereignty ultimately lies with the people and that they could move to take back the streets from an illegitimate power at any time. From

1967 epitaphs and posters celebrating the achievements of the assassinated socialist revolutionary and Argentine, Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara made their way to the walls. These street art interventions were deliberately provocative, evoking the image of the fallen revolutionary as a foil and counter to the military establishment and government ideology.

Claudia Kozak (2004) describes the May, 1968 protests in France as one of the most important events for the generation and evolution of Argentine practices of inscription. In reality however, the French May coalesced with other crucial trends and events during the period. Beginning with a series of student strikes in Paris, social and political unrest in France quickly accelerated as police interventions fuelled further actions by students, workers and artists. Whilst Brazilian artist-activists from *Tupinãodá* directly cite images of the French May as a catalysing process, it is notable that *Cristianismo y Revolucion*, the dominant newspaper of the Peronist and Guevarist revolutionary left in Argentina did not mention events in France even once. Rather, its commentary centred on the Prague Spring, and quite notably threw its support behind the Soviet suppression and not the political activists (Vezzetti 2009). This choice reflected the battle lines drawn between East and West, Communism and Capitalism; in the broader context of Cold War bi-polarity.

Nonetheless, the sheer power of civil disobedience demonstrated in France seemingly served as a direct catalyst for some organised groups in Argentina. Artists and intellectuals were particularly heavily impacted. Studying artistic practices around 1968, Giunta (2007) and Camnitzer (2007) are among those who “register a decisive shift not only in the look and form of art objects, but also in the concept of political subjectivity itself – a change in the nature of political agency that was often actively facilitated by and through artistic practice” (Greeley 2007). One of the most striking examples of this shift was seen in the articulations of the *Grupo de Artistas de Vanguardia* (Avant Garde Art Group) who in 1968 began to

consciously redraw the links between artistic practice and politico-social aspiration; seeking to engender a cultural militancy akin to that which had emerged in Europe with the Situationists. Artist-activist Graciela Carnevale, who was part of the Rosario-based group of artists, directly links her own participation to events beyond Argentina: the Vietnam War, the Cuban Revolution and the ideas emerging from Paris. She claims:

We organised encounters and discussed the new aesthetics, how this new aesthetics had to be and the new ways of the new art we were seeking, and at that time we thought the best work of art would be a work similar to a political art (Carnevale 2006).

The Rosario artists began to form small working groups and staged politically provocative actions and exhibitions at the Di Tella Institute, the French Embassy and other established cultural venues before moving their works closer to what they perceived to be the true sites and locations of anti-government struggle. The streets and plazas of Rosario and Buenos Aires were dominant in this conception. Carnevale explains that the groups' artistic practice increasingly addressed the changes in society that had occurred as a result of the regime's power; the economic and social dislocations, acts of violence and increasing polarisation that could be seen and felt across social fora:

We...began to ask ourselves what the function of art in society was, what was the role of the artist in society. For us art did not only have to do with manual and technical skills, but was also an intellectual activity...We also wanted to address another public, because we did not want to show our work exclusively to cultural elites, but to a wider public. As a result we decided to organise what we called the 'Experimental Art Cycle' (Carnevale 2006)

As described in documents donated to Essex University by Graciela Carnevale, the Rosario Artists' '*Experimental Art Cycle*' featured installations in small public spaces sought to bring together the revolutionary currents in Argentine society with those in Argentine art. Some of

these interventions played with the idea of government censorship. The work of Eduardo Favario led viewers firstly to a closed down gallery space, which had been staged to appear as though it had been shut down by the police. Posters and inscriptions at the gallery site then directed viewers toward a nearby bookshop where the artist's work was displayed. This act physically removed art from a cost-prohibitive elite space and placed it somewhere more modest. Other actions seemed to provide a commentary and critique of Argentine society in its passivity towards state- sanctioned violence. Emilio Ghilioni for example, simulated a street fight in which onlookers were challenged to intervene. This work sought to incite physical action in defense of other human bodies. Carnevale herself sought to evoke greater sensitivities toward the routine violence committed by the police and backed by the regime. One of her installations locked audience members inside a gallery space and left it up to them to get out. She notes that the captives failed to take initiative leading to their release and it was left to an outsider to break the window and allow them out. Of the work, she claims:

Through an act of aggression, the work intends to provoke the viewer into awareness of the power with which violence is enacted in everyday life. Daily we submit ourselves passively, out of fear or habit, or complicity to all degrees of violence, from the most subtle and degrading mental coercion from the information media and their false reporting to the most outrageous and scandalous violence exercised over the life of a student (Carnevale 1968).

At first, the cycle received financial and discursive support from the di Tella Institute. However, after Carnevale's intervention aroused police interest for its timely coincidence with the one-year anniversary of the death of Che Guevara, the space was closed down and institutional backing was swiftly removed. This marked the beginning of the group's full break with the cultural institutions and galleries. Later in the year, the group met in Rosario and again in Buenos Aires. During these encounters, a new 'culture of subversion' was

proposed, which, manifesting itself through creative initiatives, would assist the working classes on the road to revolution (Padin 1997). A large-scale project was agreed upon; a counter-information campaign that would redirect popular knowledge about the socio-economic conditions of labourers in the province of Tucumán (Longoni 2010).

As an initiative of Onganía's development program, the North East province of Tucumán was chosen as a point of implementation for industrialisation and de-unionisation. *Operativo Tucumán* (Operation Tucumán) resulted in the closure of the traditional sugar refineries, which provided the majority of income and work for the populace and left the region's inhabitants to persevere amid conditions of extreme poverty and hardship (Longoni 2010). Outside of the province, Onganía's media machine hailed *Operativo Tucumán* as a resounding success, giving birth to a web of myths that would conceal the region's hardship from the general public (Albero and Stimpson 1999). Suspicious of the media and having heard rumours to the contrary, part of the Artist's group visited Tucumán to document the reality of the situation. They took photos, films and conducted interviews with farmers and *campesinos*. The group documented approximately 60,000 unemployed; widespread malnutrition resulting in a high percentage of child mortalities, as well as the exploitative incursion of the Coca Cola company.

Meanwhile, others remained in Rosario and began work on a counter information campaign to illuminate the issues in Tucumán. The first stage of the publicity campaign involved the widespread, clandestine distribution of posters in Rosario and Buenos Aires, which featured just the word "*Tucumán*" in high contrast black and white script. These interventions brought the province into the minds of the public, evoking a sense of mystery and expectation around the posters; their producers and their purpose. In the second stage the artists combined forces with the already active student movement who went to the streets and plazas in both cities,

projecting the words “*Tucumán ARDE*” [Tucumán BURNS] with large-scale, highly visible black graffiti, a textual invocation of drama and intrigue around the metaphor of flames engulfing the province. This advance was followed in the coming weeks with posters aimed at the Trade Unions, advertising “*1st biennial de arte de vanguardia*” (the first biennial of art of the vanguard); invoking the Leninist tone, to set themselves apart from the self-described ‘avant-garde’ with the derisive insinuation that artists who had been captured by the Di Tella Institute was entirely misdirected.⁴⁷

As with the earlier work of artist-activist Favario, a combination of street art modes (posters, graffiti, fliers and handbills were utilised in concentration to direct spectators toward and to denote the exhibition spaces at CGT headquarters in Rosario and Buenos Aires. The actual exhibitions consisted of enlarged photos; sensory manipulations (the lights would come on and off at intervals to symbolise the frequency of children’s deaths from starvation); documents and graphs.

The exhibitions featured all-over interior environments made up of posters, placards, photomurals, newspaper montages, and an array of statistical graphs indicating rates of infant mortality, tuberculosis, illiteracy and the like, in the region of Tucumán. Juxtaposed to this information was the full range of government-sponsored misinformation. The huge discrepancy between official and actual information was theorised by the group as having the potential not only to educate but to heighten the political consciousness of the spectators. ...The movement from handbills to exhibition displays to media strategems underscored the growing savviness of these artists to the increased role of the media in production, transmission and ultimately control of information about art and politics alike. (Albero and Stimson 1999: xxxvi)

⁴⁷ See Buck-Morss (2006) for further information on the origin and distinctions between the terms *vanguard* and *avant-garde*.

This politico-artistic event, which relied as much on street art as a pull and evolving source of intrigue as it did on the final display, was an important catalyst for mobilising diverse sectors of society against the regime. Freeing the Argentine public from its reliance on government sponsored reports, it utilised text and image; rational and affective transfer, to facilitate a collective ‘cognitive liberation’ that would provide the basis for actions undertaken during the *Rosariazo*⁴⁸ a year later.

In an interview in (2006), Carnavale expresses her feelings about *Tucumán Arde*:

I always say that artistic practice and my belonging to this group changed my life, my conception of the world and of art. We were young artists, although then some older artists joined too. At the beginning we just wanted to be recognised as artists, we wanted to be famous, to be invited to museums to make exhibitions, but what we did was not traditional art, we wanted to express ourselves, we wanted to explore new languages, new materials, and we found that in our city, Rosario, this was not possible. Museums were closed to our works and experiences... We were under the dictatorship of the 60s, and it was very repressive. Not as repressive as the following dictatorship in the 70s but violence was exercised in societies in many ways, in the most intimate ways... Young men used to have long hair. They were taken to prison and had their hair cut....we could not wear short skirts because it was not moral to do so.

This excerpt indicates that participation in the project enabled Carnavale to re-negotiate her own role as an artist and to re-imagine her position as a citizen in her country of origin and residence. The encounter undeniably filled her with a core affect of good feeling, which had a subsequent heuristic effect. Notably, she also explains that following the exhibition, many of the other contributing artists abandoned the institutional circuit altogether, feeling an emotional imperative to ‘do more’. As Longoni (2006) puts it, in the *Tucumán Arde* initiative:

⁴⁸ The *Rosariazo* was a popular uprising that took place between May and September 1969 in the province of Rosario, Santa Fe.



Plate 26: The slogan “*Tucuman ARDE*” (Tucuman BURNS) was deployed across Rosario and Buenos Aires in 1968.

...artists staged a ruthless rupture with spaces and restricted modes of circulation reserved to art -a rebellion that drove them outside or, worse still, on the opposite side of, the modernising institutional circuit with which they had shared their lives till then; a rebellion that forced them out onto the streets and made them seek for alternative environments away from the field of art.

For many, the intensification of their artistic militancy simply brought them to a point of no return. Wholly captured by the compulsion to fight for a just and democratic political outcome, they left the artistic field behind to take up more direct forms of activism, in some cases even taking up arms against the regime.

In 1968, whilst the Artists of the Vanguard were occupied with events in Tucumán, Rosario and Buenos Aires, large-scale strikes and street protests were breaking out with increasing intensity across the rest of the country in response to social injustices and acts of repression backed by the government. The *Cordabazo* erupted in May 1969, relegating Che Guevara's popular image on the city walls, shifting affective states and perceptions about political opportunities:

The elevated level of violence and the increasing politicization had its parallel growth in street art. The country became awash with street art, a temporary abatement occurring only during the first several years of the next military era, 1976-1983. The *Córdobazo* initiated the process. Street barricades went up and liberated zones, heavily demarcated with graffiti, were held for hours and several days. The chaotic, war zone environment gave protestors the ability to carry out a visual assault throughout the city in a 'war of the walls'" (Chaffee 1993:108).

Graffiti slogans documented by Chaffee included: "*La obediencia empieza con la conciencia: la conciencia con la desobediencia*". (Obedience begins with consciousness: consciousness with disobedience) and "*La violencia es patrimonio de todos, la libertad solo de aquellos que luchan por ella*". (Violence is the patrimony of all, liberty is for those who fight for it). Here,

the textual work of the increasingly complex and poetic slogans served to reinforce the notion that an injustice had been committed. Furthermore, the visual spectacle of liberated zones demarcated with graffiti and banners altered familiar physical spaces; exploding the sights and signs that would normally provide a sense of security, disrupting expectations and encouraging spectators to pick sides.

Events and confrontations during the *Córdobazo* notably brought about the birth of four guerilla groups: The *Ejercito Revolucionario del Pueblo* (Revolutionary War of the People or ERP), the *Montoneros*, the *Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas* (Peronist Armed Forces or FAP) and the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* (Revolutionary Armed Forces or FAR). The latter three of these groups were mobilised around Peronist ideals whilst the ERP was a Trotskyist-Guevarist movement opposed the Peronists, believing them to be a false liberation movement of bourgeois extraction. Chaffee (1993) expresses that all four groups became prolific producers of clandestine graffiti after 1969. To begin with, a great deal of the graffiti consisted of simple marks and inscriptions that identified the groups: “Monteneros”; “FAR”; and “ERP”. Soon, the inscriptions evolved, identifying the groups with their icons. The ERP for example commemorated Che Guevara’s death in 1971 with the phrase “October 8-Day of the Heroic Guerilla”.

Later, and particularly after the Trelew massacre, government violence became a key theme in the graffiti of all four guerilla groups. In 1972, twenty-seven captured dissidents (amongst whom all four groups were represented) escaped from Rawson Penitentiary in the capital of Argentina's Chubut Province. Nineteen of the escapees were recaptured by soldiers and transferred to an airbase near Trelew where sixteen of them were then executed. As news of the killings at Trelew filtered out, photos of victims were posted on public walls with the slogan “Glory to the heroes of Trelew”. Chaffee (1993:109) explains that “The posters

personalised the victims and confronted the citizenry visually with a moral dilemma. Victims were no longer faceless individuals. Massive graffiti complemented the visual socialization process....The event was commemorated annually in street art over the next few years". The widely disseminated photographs sought to evoke and transfer feelings of pathos and compassion. The images pushed for recognition that those killed; the 'victims' as so-described, were siblings, spouses, mothers, fathers, sons, daughters; they had faces and names, histories and sentience. They evoked a sense of common humanity, association year upon year.

Increasing societal pressures for elections were answered in March 1973 and a huge outpouring of Peronist street art came with the new democratic opening. However by this point Peronism represented a broad ideological base and each Peronist union or faction sought to differentiate its ideological position. Chaffee (1993) makes an important observation with reference to these attempts at differentiation, highlighting that the three main factions each seemed to adopt one of the Peróns as a motif ,which would appear with frequency in their street art. He notes that the leftists and Marxists adopted Evita as their icon and sometimes quoted her in their posters and graffiti. Common slogans included: "Peronism will be revolutionary or it will be nothing"; "Death or Perón"; and "Evita- the eternal flame of social justice". By contrast, the conservative, right wing and fascist elements preferred Isabel. Chaffee highlights that in posters, she was often given prominence and placed at the side of a uniformed Perón, which served to underline party 'verticalism'. Additionally, Juan or indeed all three Peróns were often employed as a symbol of the composite or unified nation (ibid.).

There was a brief democratic interlude in which Peronist party candidate Hector Campora was elected in lieu of Juan Perón who was not allowed to enter a bid. However, Perón was

able to return to the presidency in September winning an impromptu election with nearly 62% of the popular vote. During this interlude, the three Peronist factions tempered their activity, and moved from clandestine oppositional graffiti to more time consuming modes of pro-system poster production and wallpainting. However, this political shift was short-lived. Perón died in July 1974, leaving his third wife, Isabel to preside over a country plagued by civil unrest, high levels of political violence and economic turmoil.

Under Isabel Martínez de Perón's rule, aggressions increased. Under the influence of Social Welfare Minister José López Rega, Isabel's government moved strongly to the right. López Rega formed the Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance (Triple A), which began a campaign to eliminate leftists and opponents, most notably the *Montoneros* and ERP, their friends, colleagues and families. The very first clandestine torture and detention centre (CCD) is known to have been set up in Famaillá, Tucumán, an act which can be seen as an important precursor to the Dirty War. The *Operativo Independencia*, launched through Secret Decree Number 261 in February 1975 was signed into force by Isabel Perón, in general agreement with López Rega and other ministers of government (Pisani and Jemio 2012).

The official document ordered and sanctioned the carrying out of military operations, of civic and psychological actions, "in order to neutralize and/or annihilate the actions of the subversive elements" in Tucumán. Through this decree, the repressive forces of the State led by the Army and endorsed by much of the political, economic, and ecclesiastical and guild leaders, launched a systematic plan of annihilation aimed at producing a deep transformation in these social groups. (ibid.:2)

5.6 Silencio en la calle? from organised state terror to the *Siluetazo*

Isabel Perón was overthrown by military junta in 1976. Many were surprised the military had taken so long. As Fisher (1989:11) explains, "It had been two years since the death of Perón

and the transfer of power to his wife María Estela ‘Isabel’, who had proved totally incapable of resolving the in-fighting which was tearing the Peronist movement apart” and had presided over an economy on the brink of collapse. The Junta’s commanders-in-chief, General Jorge Rafael Videla, Admiral Emilio Eduardo Massera, and Air Force Brigadier Orlando Ramón Agosti, designated Videla as Argentina’s new president and issued decrees setting into motion *El Proceso del Reorganización Nacional* (The Process of National Reorganisation, also ominously termed ‘The Process’) during which over 10,000 individuals were kidnapped and/or killed. As this section endeavors to explain, ‘*la Guerra Sucia*’ (the Dirty War) engendered such extreme levels of repression and societal fear that forms of civil disobedience, including street art production entered a rapid decline, giving way to a near-silence on the streets of Buenos Aires. The pervasiveness of violence and levels of distrust, which descended over Argentine society in this period were unprecedented, bringing a normally highly articulated society to state of near expressive paralysis. One of the few groups to stage interventions on the streets at this time were the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* (Mothers of the May Square) whose daring actions, incorporating auxiliary modes of street art, provided inspiration and hope to many fellow Argentines and helped to disseminate information about disappearances to the outside world. As this section elaborates, while many Argentines were immobilised by fear, the *Madres* were driven by their inexpressible sense of loss and desperation for closure, intensities which facilitated risky, indeed dangerous actions that served to chip away at the military’s self-projections.

Romero (2002) indicates that the economic crisis which accelerated under Isabel Perón’s leadership, factional struggles and the daily presence of conflict and death, as well as the “terror sown by the Triple A”, all created the conditions for the tacit acceptance of a military government that “promised to reestablish order and ensure the state’s monopoly on violence.” (Romero 2002:215). Lyman Chaffee, who was present in Buenos Aires at the time Videla

attained the presidential seat, writes that during the first six months of the regime street art was vigorously produced by the guerrilla groups, as well as sectors of the now broad-based Peronist movement. Yet, as the regime became more and more repressive, the visibility of oppositional graffiti and posters receded.

The program of the military... consisted of eliminating the root of the problem, which according to its diagnosis was found in society itself and in the unresolved nature of society's conflicts. The nature of the proposed solution could be read in the metaphors employed by the new government to describe that society—sickness, tumor, surgical removal, major surgery—all summed up in one proposal that was unambiguous and conclusive: The military had come to cut the Gordian knot with a sword. (Romero 2002:215-216)

The full extent of atrocities committed by the military government, through the so-called Task Groups, which largely consisted of junior military officers, non-commissioned officers, off-duty policemen and committed civilians, only began to emerge after the fall of the regime when the *Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas* (National Commission of Disappeared Persons, or CONADEP) report was made public and members of the military establishment began to be called to trial for their crimes. Many years on, it is understood that acts of terror were divided into four determinate events or moments: kidnapping, torture, arrest, and execution (Romero 2002), which exhibited profound levels of cruelty and psychological divisiveness:

For the abductions, each group organized for that purpose—commonly known as “the gang” (*la patota*)—preferred to operate at night, to arrive at the victims' homes, with the family as witnesses; in many cases, family members became victims themselves in the operation. But many arrests also occurred in factories or workplaces or in the street, and sometimes in neighboring countries, with the collaboration of local authorities. Such operations were realized in unmarked but well-recognized cars— the

ominous green Ford Falcons were the favorite—a lavish display of men and arms, combining anonymity with ostentation, all of which heightened the desired terrorizing effect. The kidnapping was followed by ransacking the home, a practice that was subsequently refined so that the victims were forced to surrender their furniture and other possessions, which became the booty of the horrendous operation (Romero 2002:217)

Those taken away by the Task Groups were usually subjected to prolonged periods of torture in which they might be subjected to sexual abuse; simulated drowning; electrocution as well as forms of psychological abuse including having to witness the torture and killing of loved ones. These methods were carried out under the premise of information extraction, identification and location of dissenters. However, as Romero (2002:217) poignantly notes, “...generally it served to break the resistance of the abducted persons, to annul their defenses, to destroy their dignity and personality”.

The green Ford Falcons were not the only ominous visual indicator of the regime’s covert violence and total impunity. The utter absence of oppositional inscriptions in a political culture usually characterised by a high degree of street-based articulation created zones of aesthetic uniformity, punctuated only by the military’s own street based articulations. The regime’s articulations largely consisted of posters and usually espoused the virtues of the military establishment and even professed their unfaltering commitment to human rights. Amongst the examples given by Chaffee is a poster, which accompanied the Inter-American Human Rights Commission’s fact-finding visit to Argentina in 1979. In this poster, the military regime emphasised that “We are right and human”.

There were many victims, but the true objective was to reach the living, the whole of society that, before undertaking a total transformation, had to be controlled and dominated by terror and by language. The state became divided in two. One-half, practicing terrorism and operating clandestinely, unleashed an indiscriminate

repression free from any accountability. The other, public and justifying its authority in laws that it had enacted, silenced all other voices. Not only did the country's political institutions disappear, but the dictatorship also shut off in authoritarian fashion the free play of ideas, indeed their very expression. The parties and all political activity were prohibited, as were the labor movement and trade-union activity. The press was subject to an explicit censorship that prevented any mention of state terrorism and its victims. Artists and intellectuals were watched over. Only the voice of the state remained, addressing itself to an atomized collection of inhabitants (Romero 2002:219).

'The Process' can be described in terms of an environment in which visual cues, whispers and anecdotes about disappearances combined to produce an atmosphere of widespread fear and even expressive paralysis. Authors have been quick to point to fear as an affective state or coherent emotion. But fear, as Russell explains, is in fact an everyday, culturally specified 'folk concept' that does not correspond to just one feeling but has been developed over time as a means of ordering experience. As he explains,

Human ancestors developed the concepts of fear, anger, and other emotions to account for occasional dramatic events that seemed to be qualitatively different from normal thinking and acting. Different cultures recognized somewhat different emotions. Today, fear, anger, and other discrete emotion concepts have the weight of tradition and everyday experience behind them. They are concepts that shape the way people view themselves and others. These concepts configure psychological reality. They are part of spoken language, and humans stand nearly speechless without them. The analysis here suggests that these concepts have empirical standing and provide understanding and prediction. (Russell 2003:152).

As such, fear is perhaps better thought of as a range of emotions that combine around antecedents and a negative core affect to produce a categorisable response to an object, in this case the military government and the imprecise boundaries of the camps (Longoni 2007). In

Argentina, a state of ‘fear’ was thus reinforced by pro-system street art and other visual stimuli. Yet, it also determined, in turn, perceptions about the conditions for protest; the risk versus the utility of taking to the streets, the probable consequences of being associated with anti-system articulation. Interviews and enquiries with a number of artists and commentators in 2011, yielded common refrains: “there was no political street art in the dictatorship years, indeed there was no street art, no activist art, no political graffiti” “it was too dangerous to produce street art” (GG 2011) “You are looking in the wrong place. It was too repressive during the dictatorship”. Yet, if we consider, auxiliary modes, as Chaffee does, then there was of course at least one notable exception.

By 1977 one of the only visible modes of resistance on the streets of the capital were the *Madres* and *Abuelos de Plaza de Mayo* (Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo) who began a weekly march and vigil on the Buenos Aires’ central square, the Plaza de Mayo, armed with posters and printed photographs of their disappeared children and grandchildren. As Fisher (1989:52) explains in her account of the women’s movement, “The decision to install a permanent weekly presence in the Plaza de Mayo was an act of desperation rather than one of calculated political defiance. It was an act of desperation which the women believed only other mothers who had lost their children would share”. It is of course theoretically pertinent that the initial mobilisation was not, for most participants, based on a rational calculation about risk and possible outcomes but was rather an unyielding imperative borne of love and yearning.

The *Madres* and *Abuelas* are now internationally renowned for their bold defiance in the face of brutality and their weekly marches have come to occupy an important place in the history annals. That auxiliary street art modes played a crucial role in mobilising the women, is a lesser known fact. Dora de Bazzze, one of the *Madres* explains that:

Our first problem was how we were going to organise meetings if we didn't know each other. There were so many police and security men everywhere that you never knew who was standing next to you. It was very dangerous. So we carried different things so we could identify each other. For example one would hold a twig in her hand, one might carry a small purse instead of a handbag, one would pin a leaf to her lapel, anything to let us know this was a Mother...we tried to produce leaflets as well- we had to do it secretly because it was illegal of course – and little stickers saying the mothers will be in such a place on such and such a day and *Donde estan nuestros hijos desaparecidos?* [Where are our disappeared children?] or *Los militares se he llevado nuestros hijos* [The military have taken our children. We went out at night to stick them on buses and underground trains. And we wrote messages on peso notes so that as many people as possible would see them. This was the only way to let people know that our children had been taken, and what the military government was doing, because when you told them, they always said 'They must have done something'. There was nothing in the newspapers; if a journalist reported us, he disappeared; the television and radio were completely under military control, so people weren't conscious. In the beginning we had no support at all. (de Bazze cited by Fisher 1989:53)

Another Madre, María del Rosario is cited by Fisher (1989:52), explaining that as the group expanded, there was no explicit aim to march on the Plaza. In fact, the weekly march originated as a practical measure employed to circumvent police repression, an act of infrapolitics. The women would attempt to meet to talk about their disappeared relatives and knit on the square. Yet, whenever more than two of the *Madres* sat down together they were speedily dispersed by the rifle-pointing military personnel. Resultantly they took to circling the Plaza on foot, walking two by two to avoid being moved on or targeted. Chaffee (1993:110) adds, that after a while, to recognise each other and “[t]o heighten the visual impact, women wore white kerchiefs tied over their heads; embroidered in coloured thread on the kerchief was the name and date of the disappeared kin. The white kerchiefs became the

group's most significant symbol".

Initially, the military paid little heed to the *Madres* and *Abuelas*, not considering for a moment that a group of animated middle-aged women could pose a threat to their credibility or position. However, as Fisher explains, the *Madres* in fact confronted the military with an important and course-changing foil; the *Madres* leveled at them, the very image of ordered society, stability and the family model that they themselves claimed to support and uphold. The "silent, accusing presence" (Fisher 1989:60) of the mothers without their children, implied that it was the military who had damaged stable family life and undermined Christian values; it was military who lacked legitimacy.

Navy commander, Admiral Emilio Eduardo Massera, was amongst the ambitious figures of prominence and he sought a means by which to popularly legitimise the Process and at the same time carry himself to power. "Massera, who carried out a major part of the repression from the navy mechanics' school and gained distinction in that sinister competition, always played his own game ... He took great pains to find issues and causes that would win some degree of popular support for the government, such as the World Cup soccer championships—played in the country in 1978 and hosted by Admiral La- coste—and later the conflict with Chile, which served as a prelude to the Falklands-Malvinas War, also instigated by the navy" (Romero 2002:82). Veigel (2009) directs attention towards a multiplicity of factors, which contributed directly or indirectly to the total breakdown of the military dictatorship after 1982. Amongst these, the delegitimising of the regime, the strengthening of civil society, economic decline and the military's failure to oust the British in the war for Las Malvinas were particularly important. Undoubtedly given a boost by the weekly presence of the *Madres* and *Abuelas* outside the *Casa Rosada*,⁴⁹ street art and

⁴⁹ The *Casa Rosada* is the presidential palace in Buenos Aires.

activism resurged in the early 1980's as discontent mounted and more and more people found that their lives had touched by a 'disappearance'.

Despite spiralling costs, the military government decided to progress with the preparations to host the 1978 world cup, a bid which had been made by the earlier Peronist government. This decision was premised on the potential to exploit the opportunity of being in the international media spotlight. The occasion presented a chance to rally national pride and to project an outward image of a calm, orderly and tolerant Argentina that would subdue the regime's foreign critics. "While the foreign television cameras were focused on Argentina, the junta would put into operation all the propaganda machinery at its disposal, to create an image of peace and stability." (Fisher 1989:72). Posters advertising the event decorated every conceivable surface, TV and radio stations emitted nationalist rhetoric intended at mobilising the citizenry behind the Argentine flag. Notably, "The military government never managed either to arouse enthusiasm or to garner explicit support among the whole of society" (Romero 2002:220) and the *Madres* found themselves marginally more secure as the presence of international journalists guaranteed against any large-scale violent crack down on their vigils.

When the Malvinas War broke in 1982, the state sponsored street art that targeted Margaret Thatcher and Alexander Haig as the enemy, depicted the islands in the Argentine national colours of white and sky blue and commemorated the dead as martyrs to nationalism. The war soon proved a disaster for the Argentine forces and the regime, already presiding over an unstable economy and facing increasing criticism from abroad for its Human Rights violations, collapsed. Chaffee (1993:111) documents that "...the walls castigated them in a stream of anti-armed forces sentiments that did not cease during the succeeding Alfonsín era". During these closing stages of dictatorship, new street art initiatives granted increased

visibility to the fight against the repressive state machinery and suppression of information about the estimated 30,000 *desaparecidos* (disappeared).

Perhaps the most poignant and inescapable of these visual productions was the creation of thousands of life-sized human silhouettes in 1983. Drawn or printed on wood paper and then pasted "...in a standing posture, onto walls, trees, and pillars around the Plaza de Mayo" (Longoni 2006). This event, which came to be called the '*Siluetazo*', invoking the memory of past civil uprisings, surprisingly largely eludes the attention of either Chaffee or Kozak and is only given a thoroughgoing analysis by Argentine scholar Ana Longoni.

This practice of silhouette-making began on September 21st, 1983, before the fall of the dictatorship and on the occasion of the *III Marcha de la Resistencia* (Third March of Resistance) called by *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* and other human rights organisations. On this day in September, artists and activists from the *Madres* set about producing life sized human silhouettes and pasting them to the walls and gates around the Plaza de Mayo. As Longoni explains, the idea for the intervention had come from three visual artists Rodolfo Aguerreberry, Julio Flores, and Guillermo Kexel; who had in turn been inspired by the installation work of Polish artist, Jerzy Skapski, whose work, displayed in the 1978 volume of the '*United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Magazine*' had been a comment on the Nazi concentration camps and the number of dead (Longoni and Bruzzone 2008.). Aguerreberry, Flore and Kexel first sought to play with the idea of a physical manifestation of the number of disappeared bodies within a gallery space, but they struggled to get support or a suitable display space. They turned then to the *Madres* of the Plaza de Mayo, who, with some revisions, were enthusiastic to partake in a large-scale, hyper-visible project that would confront the public and rebuke the regime:

Its remarkable impact was due not only to its mode of production (the demonstrators

lent their bodies for hundreds of artists to outline their contours, which in turn came to stand for each of the disappeared) but also to the effect achieved by the crowd of silhouettes whose voiceless screams addressed passers-by from the walls of downtown buildings on the following morning (Longoni 2006:3).

Again appropriating the enforced silence and the public spaces, the *Madres* found in the silhouettes another means by which to call the government to account and publicly delegitimise the regime without recourse to words.

In total there were three *siluetazos*; the first recaptured the public space of the Plaza de Mayo so powerfully that the action was repeated in other central locations in Buenos Aires in the months to follow. The artists and *Madres* initiated the first event, arriving at the Plaza de Mayo with rolls of wood paper, 1500 pre-prepared silhouettes, paints and stencils. To their surprise, within hours the Plaza had burgeoned into a gigantic public workshop for the production of silhouettes. Initial plans to create uniform bodies were crushed by the spontaneous initiatives of passers by who ad-libbed to represent the physical traits of their disappeared relatives. Features such as: glasses; beards; the roundness of a pregnant belly; the spinal curvature and walking canes of the elderly, were all invoked. Children lent their bodies to be drawn around to represent displaced youngsters. Aguerreberry cited by Longoni (2007:180) explains that the spontaneous and massive participation of the demonstrators made the artists dispensable. He claims “I think within half an hour of reaching there we could have left the Plaza because we were not needed for anything”.

There were certain aesthetic and symbolic principles that were enforced by the *Madres*. For example, “To completely avoid the temptation of associating the silhouettes with death...the Mothers removed from the artists project the possibility of pasting the silhouettes on the ground (which was one of the options) and made it clear to the participants the necessity of having the silhouettes standing up straight” (Longoni 2007:182).

There was a strategic and sentimental rationale behind this decision. The silhouettes were usually understood as a visual rendering of the slogan “*Aparece con vida*” (Appearance with Life), a slogan raised by the *Madres* in the 1980’s which would become an oft repeated expression in the years to follow. “Alive they were taken, alive we want them returned” was the popular sentiment of relatives, put forth most boldly by the *Madres*. The refusal to allow the figures to take the posture of the dead reflects this unyielding demand on the government. However, the demand was also backed by a collective hope, cruelly sustained by “the rumours and conjectures circulating that the repressive state apparatus kept the detainees alive in clandestine camps. This minimal hope that some of the missing persons were alive began to fade away with the passage of time, the discovery of mass graves and the testimonies of the very few survivors about the cruel methods of extermination.” (Longoni 2007).

In her translated paper on the *Siluetazo*, published in 2007, Longoni invites the reader to think about how and why this vanguardist project of re-integrating art and life was carried out and concludes that the *Siluetazo* reset social territoriality by socialising art production. In this way it ceased to be an artistic endeavour but rather came to occupy a space on the boundary between art and politics. Notably she does not seem to directly address the mechanics of social activism here though; there is little discussion around the drives and motivations of the multitudes who participated in the impromptu rendering of silhouettes around the walls of central Buenos Aires.

A comment by the artist Leon Ferrari cited by Longoni (2007:184), takes us somewhat closer to understanding the processes at play. He claims:

The [*Siluetazo*] was a culminating work, formidable not only politically but also aesthetically. The number of elements that went into play: an idea proposed by

artists, carried out by the masses without any artistic intention. It is not as if we got together for a performance, no. We were not representing anything. It was a production of what everybody felt, whose material was inside the people. It did not matter if it was art or not.

As Ferrari's comment seems to indicate, it was an immediate emotional imperative rather than a specific strategic or artistic inclination that drove the broader masses to participate in this action alongside the *Madres* and the artists.

It can be argued too, that silhouette production had several important psychosocial effects on the participants. The term 'psychosocial' refers to the mutually influencing relationship between the individual psyche and the broader social collective. Longoni's analysis indicates that participation in the *siluetazo* enabled long-internalised feelings of anxiety, rage and/or grief to be openly and collectively expressed. In this sense, the event was cathartic. It went a long way towards breaking the pact of silent complicity with the regime, encouraging and creating viable conditions for public acknowledgement of the atrocities of the Dirty War. This large-scale, hyper-visible condemnation of the regime compounded with defeat in the Malvinas/Falklands and increasing economic instabilities to bring about its total delegitimisation and fall in 1983.

The *siluetazo* itself marked a sudden and dramatic turning point in perceptions about the political environment, the balance of opportunities and threats for activism. The sudden outpouring of anti-regime sentiment and the widespread demand for answers manifest in the *siluetazo*, altered the mood of suspicion and fear amongst *porteños*. The visual materialisation of so many bodies, paper and flesh, demonstrated that those in opposition were not alone in their convictions and instilled in the populace a new confidence and hope for change.



Plate 27: *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo* would wear a white kerchief as an identifier. The kerchief was often embroidered with the name and date of disappearance of her son/daughter. This practice has continued to the present day.



Plate 28: The III *Marcha de la Resistencia* and the accompanying *siluetazo* drew a large crowd in the Plaza de Mayo.



Plate 29: Silhouettes of the disappeared covered the plaza and surrounding spaces.



Plate 30: A man ties a silhouette of his disappeared relative to trees in the plaza.

5.7 Street art and the democratic restoration

After 1983, more and more groups came to use street art as a communicative and expressive medium. In the immediate aftermath of the democratic transition many took to the streets rejoicing at the coming political changes and condemning the actions of the past. Notably however, as time wore on, issues around the impunity of military officials, and broader concerns over state of representative channels, social and economic welfare in Argentina led to periodic street art interventions initiated by a variety of activist groups. This section briefly explores some of the street art interventions which have occurred in the democratic era, highlighting street art's continued instrumental and expressive utility.

The fall of the regime in 1983 brought with it an outpouring of street art. New and old political players were represented in a burst of visual noise. Posters, handbills and graffitied forms adorned walls as well as the windows and shutters of retail premises around the city of Buenos Aires. Based on his own eyewitness account, Chaffee claims:

Those groups which were badly repressed or weakened, or had their organizational structures devastated, recovered slowly, some faster than others...in a politicized society like Argentina, new groups, new alliances, and splinters from old collectives form, break apart, and reform, in a continual struggle for survival, recognition and greater leverage. Each group used street art to advertise its metamorphosis, its identity and its realignment. (Chaffee 1993:116)

Several key themes or motifs emerged in the interventions: national and later regional elections; accountability for human rights abuses; economic policy and international solidarity with the *Sandinistas* in Nicaragua. Around the time of the 1983 national elections, the walls became a battle ground for the Peronists and Radicals who sought to counter-frame each other in the worst possible light. Peronist street art emphasised nationalist themes and

portrayed Radical presidential candidate Raúl Alfonsín as “the coca cola candidate”. The UCR responded with posters depicting Alfonsín interacting with the masses (Chaffee 1993). State-sponsored graffiti condemned the dirty war and expressed that the new Argentina would be “for democracy- against coups”. Parties and trade unions also mobilised around the direction of economic policy in the new Argentina. Leftists scrawled “*Minga al FMI*” (‘screw the IMF’) and “popular consultation on the international debt”. One CGT poster showed a starving child and stated “do not pay the international debt this way-only with social justice will democracy be consolidated”

Notably however it was not just organised (or reorganised) political parties and unions that took to the streets at this time but also individuals, small community formations and anonymous collectives. Raul Veroni began to decorate water tanks and hand out hand-painted playing cards, facilitated in great-part by the relaxation of law enforcement and censorship. The growing Armenian community in Buenos Aires took advantage of the discursive and physical spaces opened up by democratisation, using red graffiti around the urban zone of La Boca to draw attention to the genocide experienced under the Turks. Additionally, the night before trials began against officers accused of crimes against humanity, an anonymous group inscribed by the courthouse, the names of all 1200 named in the truth commission report.⁵⁰ A message accompanied the names: “all should be tried and none granted amnesty” (Chaffee 1993).

Many more interventions around this time might be more simply characterised as expressions of optimism and joy: “For democracy” “Freedom”. Following Ahmed’s insights into ‘happy objects’, it is possible to think of democratisation as a process that tends to accumulate a

⁵⁰ The *Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas*, [National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons or CONADEP] was established by President Raúl Alfonsín shortly after his 1983 inauguration. The Commission’s final report was entitled ‘Nunca Mas [Never Again]’ was authored by Ernesto Sabato and others. It detailed the full range of repressive actions by the military establishment, contained witness statements from survivors and laid out statistics on kidnappings and disappearances.

positive affective value as it passes around; a societal shift that is accompanied by waves of positive sentiment often captured discursively by concepts such as hope, excitement, happiness and relief. The outpouring of street art that occurred in the wake of the democratic transition may in part be explained in these terms. As civilians emerged from a context of repression, fear and expressive paralysis they were moved by their expectations around the promise of democracy, presented with new potentialities for action or inaction and could revise their interactions with the state and society.

5.8 Human Rights, market cooptation and the peso crisis: political street art from the nineties

During the 1990's the promise of democracy seemed to dwindle as the civilian governments under Alfonsín and Menem oscillated back and forth over their commitments in the domain of human rights. Disenchantment also mounted as neoliberal measures called for more than a mere shrinking of the public sector, but rather a total re-conceptualisation of the state in its interactions with civil society. Salaries were slashed, national enterprises sold off and public sector employees laid off. More and more people were forced to enter the informal labour market, social exclusion and inequalities increased. Additionally, Argentina was 'opened up' to the world economy, to a new globalised regime of capital accumulation that Sklair (2000) argues, converted states into brokers for a transnationalised capitalist class. The perceived failure of the state to protect citizens' economic interests and its propensity to exclude the poor spurred a new sense of outrage, eventually culminating in an extended economic, social and political crisis in 2001. Notably however, activist art practices in the era of neoliberal democracy, come up against new challenges, particularly that of market cooptation. This section provides an overview of urban street art interventions culminating with the peso

crisis. It discusses the gradual incorporation of activist art into gallery spaces and the practical and ethical crisis this has created for many groups.

Following the democratic restoration, Argentina's new government under President Alfonsín remained under the heavy influence of military hardliners and the political right. Facing pressure from these forces, and against the grain of much civilian sentiment, Alfonsín passed two laws to stop such prosecutions. *Ley de punto final* (Final Point Law) established a limited timeframe for making criminal charges against alleged human rights violators. *Ley de Obediencia Debida* (Due Obedience law) expressed that soldiers and police who were following orders from a higher authority could not be held legally responsible for their crimes. Only the highest leaders were tried, yet all of them were later pardoned by Carlos Menem, less than a year after he came to power as civilian president in 1989. Menem had campaigned on a vague populist platform, backed by the Peronist Party and he had promised redistributive benefits to many socio-economic groups. As such, voters were shocked when he embarked upon a programme of dramatic neoliberal restructuring, which included as its centrepiece, the 1991 Convertibility Law. The Law, conceived by Minister of the Economy, Domingo Cavallo, established a pegged exchange rate with the U.S. dollar and also backed the currency with dollars, artificially boosting its value. Heralded as a neoliberal success-story, Argentina exhibited strong economic growth during the 1990's. Speculative FDI poured into the country and capital became increasingly concentrated in large transnational firms and privately owned banks. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate failed to improve as fixed exchange rate reduced the demand for exports having a knock-on effect for production. Informality increased in the labour market, exacerbating inequalities, reducing tax revenue and producing persistent and dramatic increases in the federal deficit.

Longoni (2008:576) indicates that since the 1990's activist art practices in Argentina "have been subjected to a vertiginous reshaping by migration, dissolution, renaming and recycling, conflict, rupture and even expulsion". Her 2006 paper on the legacy of *Tucumán Arde* names a range of groups who emerged and intervened in the post-transition context, driven by frustrations over the prolonged impunity of the military officers. Amongst these she names Gas-tar, who later changed their name to CAPataco, incorporating an acronym for the *Colectivo de Arte Participativo Tarifa Común* [ordinary fare participative art collective]; *En Trámite* (Rosario), *Costuras Urbanas* (Córdoba), *Escombros* (La Plata), *Mutual Argentina* and *Zucoa No Es* (Buenos Aires). However, perhaps the most influential group to emerge in this period was *Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio* (Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice Against Oblivion and Silence or HIJOS), who emerged in 1995 to call for justice and accountability for crimes committed during 'The Process'. HIJOS was formed of the children of the disappeared. In collaboration with other activist groups, particularly the *Grupo del Arte Callejero* (GAC) founded in 1997 and Etcetera, they initiated and popularised the controversial protest practice of *escrache*.

An *escrache* might be described as an "exposure protest" (Longoni 2008); "something between a march, an action or happening, and a public shaming" (Whitener 2009:21) which has the ultimate aim of revealing criminal activity. *Escraches* began with efforts to disclose the identities of "genocidists"⁵¹ (Whitener 2009) to their (new) surrounding communities. Longoni (2008) describes an aim to unveil an individual's "...past as a repressor to his neighbours and work mates (as a rule, repressors have been "recycled" in companies offering

⁵¹ Importantly, the campaign of state terror carried out during the dictatorship in Argentina does not in fact constitute 'genocide' as defined in International Law. The targets of repression were not targeted due to race, colour or creed, but rather on account of their alleged political affiliations. However, many Argentines passionately invoke the term and it has been upheld by Spanish judges exercising Universal Jurisdiction in the trials of Argentine military personnel.

private security), who know nothing about his criminal record”. Whitener (2009:20-21) describes the practice as follows:

Once a genocidist is decided upon, a date for the *escrache* is fixed and members from HIJOS and other related organisations spend months working in the neighbourhood where this person lives; they work with neighborhood organisations and go door-to-door to discuss with individual residents and families what the person did and the need for denouncing it...Next comes flyering in order to invite and secure the participation of residents in the march which is part of the culminating action of the *escrache*. The march leads the enighbours to the criminal’s home where there are then theatre performances and a symbolic ‘painting’. This ‘painting’ usually involves throwing paint bombs or balloons at the building in order to mark it as the genocidist’s place of residence.

The information campaign usually involves posterage, stencilling and other visual interventions, which seek to alter the public space in ways that instil a sense of discomfort, stigma and even threat for the accused. This visual transformation of the familiar mimics and subverts the control of physical spaces that occurred during the regime. *Escraches* are described by Whitener (2009) as a form of justice in and of themselves, although this may be a somewhat euphemistic reading. The interventions do not seek reparations; they do not fit easily with the institutionalised logic of negotiation or the legal principle of due process. Rather, they directly intervene to punish the accused, leaving him/her and family vulnerable to further retributive action. In this sense, the interventions might even be viewed as a form of mob justice and source of further social fracture. Masiello asks: *Is it possible to find a version or story of the past that settle all anxieties about misrepresentation?* Indeed it isn’t. Yet, in the absence or paralysis of effective state action against the perpetrators of such heinous crimes, popular actions may well be the only means by which a restoration of the social fabric and a recovery of expressive forms can be made possible. In one of HIJO’s earliest



Plate 31: These commemorative mosaics funded by neighbourhood memorial organisations can be found on pavements across the Argentine capital of Buenos Aires. Today the city is replete with visual reminders of the atrocities carried out by the dictatorship.

[This image has been removed for reasons of confidentiality]



Plate 33: Members of the GAC carry road signs ready for deployment that direct walkers toward the home or workplace of an individual implicated in tortures and disappearances.

published statements they express “there is *escrache* because there is no justice” (Whitener 2009). *Escrache* and its attendant street art forms thus arguably fulfilled an important social function in the absence of effective institutional channels.

Since 1998, the GAC has been generating graphical interventions to compliment *escraches*. Often, they produce replica road-signs advise of the proximity of former detention centres, airfields used for "death flights"⁵² or the homes of former military officials. Longoni (2008) explains that *Etcétera's* main contribution to the *escraches* has been through their striking examples of street theatre, wherein huge mannequins or masked characters play out scenes of torture, kidnapping and confession, invoking the scenes of history in all their barbarity. There is an intention here to shock and unnerve; to draw on a repository of socially reproduced meanings and symbols for both their potential to move bodies and to inform and shape cognitions.

5.9 La calle to the white cube

Initially, “...both the GAC ‘s notices and *Etcétera's* theatrical performances were utterly invisible to the realm of art in terms of "art actions"; on the other hand, they endowed exposure protests with social identity and visibility, contributing to their being seen as a novel way of fighting impunity” (Longoni 2006:4). However, following the 2001 financial crisis and uprising, the actions of these and many more artist-activist groups seemed to attract increasing attention from the national and international art circuits, curators and entrepreneurs. The increased visibility of political street art actions, facilitated by advances in information technology fed into the art market’s ongoing ‘search for the new’.

⁵² ‘Death flights’ were one of the many modes of torture and killing utilised by the military. Political opponents were kidnapped, stripped naked and drugged before being thrown out of airplanes alive. Their bodies were often washed up on beaches and river banks.

Argentina's gross national product stagnated after 1998 and social protests increased in response to rising levels of inequality and social exclusion, falling access to healthcare and education that had been a consequence of Menem's switch and bait measures. Following the presidential election of 1999, De la Rúa followed Menem in betraying his electoral promises by reducing workers' protections (Teubal 2004). Rumours of corruption also spread. Under de la Rúa's term, the risk of default led to a debate about the feasibility and persistence of convertibility began. This stimulated a fall in speculator confidence as well as a run on the banks by Argentine account holders. December of 2001 began with a freeze on bank many banking transactions as a direct response to large dollar-denominated withdrawals (ibid.). The freeze was known as the *corralito*, (little corral). "The economy turned from recession to depression as people and businesses could not make payments. Credit evaporated. Many people took to the streets in angry demonstrations (called *cacerolazos*, because people banged casserole pots and pans to make noise)" (Saxton 2003:12). Protests and riots gained widespread regional and international coverage as activists mobilised behind the slogan "*que se vayan todos*" (throw them all out); a reference to the entire political class, deemed corrupt and incompetent. De la Rúa resigned from office on December 20th. Subsequent protests and confusion led to four different presidents succeeding him in just 10 days.

Whitener (2009:19) explains that, "in the run up to the massive wide-scale protests on December 19th and 20th 2001 the *escraches* fuelled and fed off a multitude of radical collectives and innovative social movements across Argentina". The well-known practice of *escrache* provided a cue for further contentious action on the streets, including many graffiti inscriptions that can be described as spontaneous and impassioned outbursts against the political class. The most popular expressions included "*que se vayan todos*" (throw them all out) "*violencia es robar*" (It is violence to rob) and "*congreso traidor*" (congress traitor). Yet, "1976" was often alluded to on the walls and familiar phrases such as "*nunca mas*"

(never again) and the slight adaptation, “*nunca mas bancos*” (banks, never again), appeared too, drawing symbolic links between the failings of politics and the violence of the past, and the chaos and disorder of the present.

I emphasize that I do not think that the intention of those who painted in the crisis or explosion of 2001 was art. It was a generalised reaction, it was a protest. The streets in my neighborhood (I lived in Congress, the epicenter of the stencil and chaos) were filled with political paintings amongst other outrages. The people broke windows, looted shops, set fire to everything they could, it was chaos.
(StencilLand 2011, my translation)

A large number of street art interventions were also pre-meditated or pre-planned as part of a broader protest strategy or calculated event: “...there arose a striking number of groups composed by visual artists, film and video-makers, poets, alternative journalists, thinkers, and social activists who created new ways of intervention related to social facts and movements in the hope of changing the Argentine lifestyle. These new ways comprised popular assemblies, pickets, factories recovered from inactivity by their former workers, movements gathering the unemployed, bartering clubs, etc” (Longoni 2006:4). The stencil collectives *Vomito Attack*; *Bs.As.Stencil*, *StencilLand* and *RunDontWalk* are amongst those who emerged at the time of the crisis, resolving to update the long valorised technique of political stenciling to provide a scathing political commentary on the current context. The collectives worked with an improvised and improved method of stencil production, in which a colour photo is reduced to monotone, manipulated with Adobe Photoshop graphical software in order to enhance the contrast between positive and negative spaces, printed, and then traced and cut from old x-ray films. Another artist-activist group that emerged during the crisis was the *Taller Popular de Serigrafia* (Popular Workshop for Serigraphy/Silkscreen), which utilised silkscreen printing to “produce posters that called the population to demonstrations or

activities and” in addition to “printing garments (T-shirts, handkerchiefs, banners, sweatshirts: whatever people wear and "take off in amorous demand") during political meetings and commemorations, particularly hand in hand with the pickets” (Longoni 2008:4).

Vomito Attack, make the following statement about their decision to intervene in the public spaces during the crisis:

...we arrived in Buenos Aires in December and the crisis exploded. Without any possibilities of work, no money and a lot of free time – the project started growing. At first we did cut and pastes from newspapers and magazines changing the meaning of the contained information. Then we decided to use the streets as our main canvas, so we translated all that information to stencils and went out to paint.... The name comes from how we recycle images, ideas and information. No fucking copyright exists for us. And also it's a peaceful and good way to get out all the shit that makes us sick (*Vomito Attack to antrophe* 2007) .

To be clear, the kinds of ‘shit that made them sick’ included rampant consumerism, political corruption, the dictates of the International Financial Institutions and the elitist art establishment. Santiago, one half of the outfit explains that: “Making stencils is my way to express my... interior things” (Santiago to Lyle). He explains that they decided to sign their work *Vomito Attack* because, “...when you vomit it all out, you're better”. Interestingly, Santiago here emphasises and celebrates act of stenciling for its personal, psychological benefits rather than for its instrumental and communicative functions as a protest tool. For him, the process of making political street art has its own rehabilitative and cathartic effect. In the wake of the crisis, his art is about expressing nameless ‘interior things’, the kinds of negative intensities and unbridled affective drives that accompany social and economic catastrophes.

StencilLand too points out that whilst his stenciling practice was born of the impulse to intervene during the crisis, the pull of street art production is something greater than can be explained away by his political and social commitment:

...behind each of my images is a much darker or twisted story...I do not intend to relay a message, I do not expect the viewer "understands" my ideas exactly, that is not my goal. The main target of my stencils is me. I enjoy the different stages of the process: sketching ideas in a notebook design from the PC, cutting the templates and then painting. Commonly this combination is what I enjoy, but then I'm very self-critical. I always see the error in what I paint, and that detail is not seen by others. It may be the case that my work leaves a taste of dissent, but it is rather this self-criticism, that is transformed into the "engine" which brings me back to continue designing (StencilLand 2011, my translation).

Like *Vomito Attack*, and *StencilLand*, GG from *Bs.A.Stncl* also explains in a 2011 discussion that the crisis prompted him to shift gear. He began to use his own training as a graphic artist for a greater social purpose. He explains, "None of us were political activists. None of us had ever painted in the streets...". He notes elsewhere, "It was in the air...You would see all the people in the streets and think, 'I have to do something'". Thoughtfully, he communicates the view that in Argentina people never feel free from the possibility of economic and representative crisis. There is a sense that the government is never being wholly up front with the public nor is it in full control of the economy. This is an anxiety or insecurity that has long persisted in the background but since 2001 has taken expression through GG's artistic practice (GG 2011). He explains:

For me, painting is a way of demonstrating to the public that anyone can express an idea or emotion with just a few pesos. You don't need the millions that brands pay to be in the spotlight. You don't have to be a politician who pays people to paint his propaganda. You can go out alone and express yourself with a couple of pesos with a

can of spraypaint, latex paint and a brush, or a stencil (GG to Escritos in la Calle, cited by Graffitimundo).

Activism, improvisation, and localism seem to have been driving impulses behind the reinvention of Palermo Hollywood's 'Post Bar'. Following the crisis, GG and NN from *Bs.As.Stencil* and a few other collectives were approached by the owner of the dilapidated bar in Buenos Aires' trendiest district, which they decorated in return for rights to use the space as a multi-functional cultural hub, bar, atelier (studio) and taller (workshop) named 'Hollywood in Cambodia'.

Notably, aided by tele-visual and web-based transmissions, street art interventions around the Argentine uprising caught the attention of intellectuals, activists and curators from other parts of the world, "who glimpsed in this turbulent process a novel and vital sociocultural laboratory" (Longoni 2008:575). Longoni further explains that,

The new term *turismo piquetero* (picket line tourism) describes, ironically but accurately, the stream of visitors who arrived, armed with cameras and good intentions, to visit neighbourhood meetings, reclaimed factories, pickets and roadblocks. Among other consequences, this focus of interest gave a certain international visibility to *activist art* practices, which until then had remained decidedly on the margins of the conventional spheres of institutionalised art. In this context, activist art groups were subjected to intense attention and wide international circulation. Certain groups were catapulted into prestigious biennials and group shows in Europe, America, Asia and even Oceania (ibid. 575).

As NN from *Bs.As.Stencil* exclaims, "All Americans want to come here to see the Revolution" (NN to Lyle 2007:77).

In 2003, the GAC was invited to participate in *the 50th Venice Biennial*, and the TPS was drawn into a raft of shows including invitations to four biennials (São Paulo, Moscow, Istanbul, Valencia) between 2006/2007 *RunDontWalk*, *VomitoAttack* and *Bs.As.Stencil* have also been amongst a range of stencil collectives to attract the curatorial and entrepreneurial talents of groups like *Graffitimundo*, who began operating ‘graffiti tours’ in Buenos Aires in 2007 and have more recently acted as curators for a showcase of *porteño* street art at a gallery in East London. *Graffitimundo*’s co-founder Jonny describes the organisation’s role as one of “intermediary, information provider and tour operator” (Robson 2011), adding earnestly that they seek to do much more of the second thing.

As Longoni indicates in an article addressing an “activist art at the crossroads” (Longoni 2008), irremediable ethical and practical tensions are often created when activist art is absorbed into the gallery circuit. On the one hand, as argued in the introduction to this thesis, a preference for cultural and aesthetic heterogeneity determined by the needs of capital ultimately drives this process of absorption. Where normally the politically committed is banished from the establishment for its dangerous totalitarian ambition and its aesthetic vacuity, street art today finds increasing acceptance when it is exoticised and historicised; curatorially framed as tool of long-passed struggles or of distant, alien others.

There is both a philosophical and a practical concern that gallery insertion disempowers the medium of political street art by inverting its anti-institutionalist (and often anti-capitalist) function; stripping it of meaning by placing it in a setting where access is often restricted to an educated, contemplative elite. Further difficulty surrounds the important ethical question captured by Masiello. He asks: “*Who is allowed to recall the past? Can the mediations of art ever respect the memory of horror?*” It is absolutely crucial to acknowledge that when an intervention is labelled as art and framed by curatorial narrative, there is a risk of reduction

and abuse of the past (and therefore also the present) that is somehow deemed far less forgivable than the framings and rhetorical devices employed in the moment of contentious political action.

These tensions also often manifest at the level of the collective with devastating consequences for group cohesion. In the aftermath of very real socio-economic turmoil, the promise of fame and fortune offered in return for self-commoditisation can be particularly tempting. In the case of the GAC, invitations to art event caused disagreements between members as to their guiding ethic and whether their actions were weakened, even undermined by exhibition. Tensions were finally resolved when the group decided not to show their productions in conventional exhibition spaces. Charo from the GAC summarises:

In 2000 we travelled for the first time as a group, to a meeting in Monterrey, with a five-star hotel and a lot of money for the work. We did our last international shows in 2005, in Germany and France. We got fed up with it and decided not to go to any more shows. [The invitations] kept coming, we turned them down, and then they stopped coming. We've got a black mark against us. Many people think we don't exist any more. And we had to put up with a lot of criticism, discussion, comments from people who don't know us but talk about our contradictions or problems. All that contributed to our radical decision not to participate any more... I could be seduced by the travelling. It's great to travel for free! But it's not free... You think you don't give a shit about that world, you can just use it to travel, but it's not for free, something happens to us (Charo to Longoni, in Longoni 2008:582)

On the other hand, *Vomito Attack* have ceased collaborating together due to differences of opinion with regard to the commoditisation and relocation of their art from the street to the white cube. Santiago works and exhibits independently as *Cabaillo Stencil* whilst Nico, the other half of the duo, is now one of the few stencil artists who refuses to work within gallery spaces or take commissions from the government. Nico instead chooses to work with stencil

flash mobs and social projects; the topics he addresses in his art are steadfastly those of political and economic injustice at home and abroad.

Others have been more adaptable to commercial demands. In an interview in 2011, *StencilLand* explains his initial misgivings about doing street art for money.

This is my livelihood, I have the luck to live this way. [This was] something unthinkable and unacceptable to me years ago. I found it very shocking to paint something to sell, It seemed to me that it lost its essence, its spirit. When I paint in the street I do not sign, do not put my name or my initials, nor my group and much less my email or website. I do not care about fame, I do not appear, do not pretend to be an artist. But I reached a moment, where the stencils became bigger each time, where I needed to buy more aerosols, where I had to spend more time doing what I wanted: to "keep painting." [So I thought] "Ok. If I sell something, I invest in aerosols" ... The more I sell the more I can paint, bigger, more time to design. It then turned into an ecosystem in a symbiosis. I sell too continue painting on the street.

At first I felt like a traitor to myself. I felt that I was selling out, like I had turned into another cog, I felt as though I had a "mask". Then I realized it was a mask, and a sellout when I wore a tie to work. I do what I want, what motivates me, people like my work and moreover, I am paid to do what I really want. What else I can ask?
(StencilLand 2011, my translation)

Bs.As.Stencil have performed several indoor shows, including 'Adentro' (Inside) in 2005. GG of *Bs.As.Stencil* summarises his position, succinctly:

In my view street art is a political tool and it has an extremely important role in society. It is an expressive outlet when all other outlets are exhausted. Yes, for me street art belongs on the street and we endeavor to make most of our work of this nature, also providing a critical or satirical commentary (GG 2011).



Plate 34: *Bs.As.Stncl's* intervention which adorned President George W Bush with a pair of Mickey Mouse ears, was reproduced globally.

However, he also notes that these days it is impossible to work entirely outside of the commercial circuit because street art is now a product and a tourist attraction, regardless of his own or others' sentiments about this commercialisation. The work of *Bs.As.Stencil* and other collectives have, in large measure, been popularised and reduced to a purely decorative function. In Argentina today there is a great deal of private demand for the stencil collectives to beautify outdoor spaces such as shop fronts; bars and even people's homes. GG explains that a lot of the work that is now visible on the streets is based on commissions made by merchants, friends and other street art consumers. In these instances, the painted spaces generally constitute the private property of the patrons and as such the police nor the state have the power to intervene. GG's *Bs.As.Stencil* collaborator, NN cynically insinuates that the state, having realised the rent-making potentials of *turismo piquetero* (picketeer tourism), no longer interferes with their work because it attracts foreigners to some of the city's more outlying and poorer districts. The two acknowledge that for them, there is little risk of prosecution (GG 2011, NN 2007); the context and considerations in street art production now a far cry from the infrapolitics of the dictatorship era.

5.10 Argentine street art: a landscape in motion

Of the three countries under discussion in this dissertation, Argentina presents itself as perhaps the most developed or articulated in terms of political street art interventions. This section provides a summary and discussion of the material presented in this chapter, tying together the various themes and events explored above in order to pose some answers to the three questions guiding the project's enquiry. It is argued that popular forms including stencil, wall-painting, muralism and poster production have been utilised variously by pro-system and anti-system groups, state and non-state actors, in their battles to frame, counter-frame, mobilise resources and people, shock, excite and frighten. Taking political street art as

a historical source material illuminates the shifting interests, commitments and affiliations of claim-makers as well as the targets of their claims. Moreover, the interviews with artist-activists are revealing in terms of the feelings, experiences and impulses that lead them to produce street art as a mode of protestation as well as those which accompany them through or result from the process of creative-expressive production.

Drawing material from a variety of sources and testimonies, this chapter validates Chaffee's suggestion that the history of Argentine political street art is deeply interwoven with the emergence and ascendance of the populist Peronist movement in the early twentieth century. However, it goes beyond Chaffee by revealing other early influences, imported methods and trends that have shaped articulations in important ways and have reflected political and demographic changes. The development of fileteado on the one hand reveals the passage of cultural expressions resulting from new and accelerated patterns of migration. On the other hand, the chapter posits that David Siqueros' call to a revolutionary street-based art and his recommendations regarding the practice of stenciling have been repeated, reinterpreted and redeployed time and again in the Argentine context.

The examples explored here provide support for the argument that political street art may prove to be a choice mode or 'contentious performance' during periods of civilian rule, as a plurality of actors vie for support; as well as under authoritarian or government, where the rule of law is applied arbitrarily and institutional channels of representation are obstructed by corruption, censorship and the threat of violence. In respect of the former, Argentina's golden era is perhaps most illustrative. In respect of the latter, the strategic actions of artist-activists around the *Tucumán Arde* intervention as well as the earlier mobilising efforts of the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* provide informative cases. Particularly strikingly however, street art has also provided an important recourse and expressive outlet during times of systemic and

representative crisis. This point is explored more closely in address to the pschyosocial and affective possibilities of street art, below.

The more or less continued presence of political street art in Argentina since the 1930's may provide scholars with a useful source of a popular social history. It has served frequently as a mirror of the hopes and frustrations of the multitudes and it provides important insights as to the location and substance of sentiments towards dominant social actors and issues at particular moments in time. However, it is not just the thematic or discursive content of street art that is indicative in the Argentine case, and any attempted 'reading' of street art for its discursive content must take into account the caveat raised in this text about the problem of intentionality and the ever-partial nature of affect capture. Street art's very presence, its concentration and the particular form that it takes can convey important things about the socio-political context and matrix of political opportunities. For example, it is notable that during the most repressive years of the military dictatorship, the urban visuality was altered drastically. The city of Buenos Aires, normally awash with visual noise, became increasingly uniform and devoid of oppositional street art interventions. This transition away from plurality and articulation was a direct consequence of societal 'fear' invoked by the violence and repression of the regime. Quite importantly, the examples of regime-sponsored street art and more recently, the practice of *escrache* demonstrate quite clearly the more belligerent potentials of street art; the ways in which it might serve as a cue or collaborative instrument for violent as well as non-violent action on both sides.

This chapter demonstrates that anti-system street art interventions or even the lack thereof, can feed into the socio-political environment in significant and varied ways. By altering physical spaces and manipulating perceptions about the prevailing opportunities and possibilities for social and political change, they can provide a cue for action or indeed

inaction. The early auxiliary interventions of the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* are suggestive in terms of the ways that careful, clandestine street art productions can assist with mobilising actors and counter-framing the target of claims. The *Madres'* persistence in their public appearances, their coded symbols as well as their production and dissemination of ephemera, facilitated in the gradual erosion of the legitimacy of state machinery. However, the *siluetazo* in 1983 further exemplified what street art can do in contentious politics, particularly the means by which it can alter moods and courses of action. Whilst the initiative for the *siluetazo* was characterised by certain concrete aims, it was an immediate affective imperative rather than a specific strategic or artistic inclination that drove the broader masses to participate in the event and it proved cathartic. The episode visually altered the public space and in so-doing also changed the mood of suspicion and fear amongst observers, helping to reform bonds of trust amongst citizens and redisclose the balance of threat and opportunity in participation. In this way and without recourse to the linguistic, the *siluetazo* helped to create fissures in the 'pact of silent complicity with the regime', thereby creating more viable conditions for a public acknowledgement of the atrocities of the Dirty War.

Moreover, data derived from discussions and interviews with Argentine artist-activists reveal something of the rehabilitative and psychosocial role played by street art during times of repression, crisis and transition. In a context where a rationalised fear was the main paralysing factor for much of society, this chapter reveals how the *Madres'* exemplary actions were departed from the norm. Additionally, stencil artists operating in the context of the 2001 peso crisis and its aftermath describe their compulsion to paint and allude to the ways in which producing political street art enabled them to re-imagine their social functions and responsibilities as citizens, turning them into protagonists rather than passive recipients in the prevailing political and socio-economic context.

CHAPTER 6

Discussion and Conclusion

Premised upon gaps and irregularities in the existing literatures, the central objective of this dissertation has been to suggest where and how the propositions of political process theory might be deepened and extended to better account for the whys and the ways that politically committed street art is employed in contentious politics; its specificities as a ‘contentious performance’ that force us to move beyond the confines of traditional social movement theory. Investigations, which span multiple decades in three Latin American states, have been centred around three main research questions, which are designed to probe for insights into what street art can do in protest. The questions address the interrelated domains of instrumentality (use and function), context and medium as well as the psychosocial and affective dimensions of street art reception and production:

1. What social and political conditions might encourage a turn to street art as a mode and strategy of resistance?
2. What can the presence style and concentration of street art tell observers about the socio-political context?
3. In what ways can street art interventions feed back into the social milieu, altering or sustaining the possibilities for resistance?

The section that follows provides a summary of insights gathered around each question, synthesising material from the three country studies. It then proceeds to restate the key arguments and theoretical advances made in this research project before suggesting its broader relevance for International Relations.

6.1 A restatement of purpose and intervention

In the introduction to this dissertation, several theoretical and empirical pitfalls in the political process approach were highlighted. These included: a tendency toward reductive positivistic explanatory models; a lack of attention to activism under authoritarianism; a lack of attendance to potentials and specificities at the level of the ‘contentious performance’ and a failure to address or incorporate issues around the role and function of visual strategies in political protest. The latter problem is not exclusive to political process but rather persists in the field of International Relations more broadly. The stories, insights and suggestions for theoretical and epistemological extension that are captured herein seek to address these gaps, oversights and imbalances in the existing literatures.

The focus on political street art provides a way in which to carry forward Charles Tilly’s concept of the ‘contentious performance’, clarifying and updating its definition in order to highlight its performative possibilities as well as redirecting focus from the level of the repertoire to the level of the performance itself. This dissertation joins the comparatively small number of studies that tackle protest practices under authoritarian rule, periods of transition and representative crisis. It deals variously with the instrumental and strategic deployments of street art and the points of rupture and incomprehension that can sometimes stimulate an aesthetic and non-rationalised response.

As outlined in the dissertation’s introductory chapter, the field of the non-rationalised, is not an entirely new point of focus for social theory. It is possible for instance, to cite clear precedents in Baumgarten’s notion of aesthetics, characterised as a branch of philosophy dedicated to contemplations around the ‘lower sensate capacities’. Whilst there has been a keen endeavour to recover a form of “social aesthetics” akin to Baumgarten’s amongst some cultural theorists, social movement scholars have been held back by anxieties linked to past

endeavours. Moving away from the narrow objectivism of earlier political process theory as well as the rationalist anxiety still apparent in its more recent cultural turn, this dissertation invokes the concept of affect to deal with the pervasive mishandling of *feeling* in the literature.

Through the import of affect, some crucial issues around the role and function of visual strategies in political protest are addressed. Affective energies are shown to facilitate or hinder endeavours to frame issues, spaces and characters, among other things. Engaging the mere possibility that bodies can be moved or spurred into a nonrationalised action by their visual or other sensory encounters in turn moves us towards a more accurate rendering of the complex processes within which activists operate and those which in turn operate upon them in the course of experiencing and producing politically committed street art.

6.2 Evidentiary street art practices: summing up

In all three of the country cases explored in this dissertation, politically committed street art has been levelled as a pro-system and anti-system performance. It has had demonstrable utility for political activists militating during periods of democratic rule, when a plurality of actors have had free use of the medium to compete for backing and express their opinions; as well as under authoritarian government, where the rule of law has been applied arbitrarily and regular representative channels have been blocked by corruption, censorship or threat of brutality. Street art has been utilised to frame and counter-frame actors and issues; to mark out territories, communicate strategy and to express political sentiment. Most importantly, in each of its primary functions, street art's power and utility depend not only on its empirical credibility but also its affective pull, a point which is drawn out more strongly in the sections to follow.

In the case of authoritarian rule, oppositional street art has succeeded as a strategic choice because it offers opportunities for communication, resource mobilisation and expression that are otherwise obstructed. In discussions around the interventions of the *Círculo 70*, *Tucumán Arde* and the *Madres of the Plaza de Mayo* it was shown how street art, as an underground communicative medium, can convey information, meanings and values that challenge official discourse and orient societal views away from those of the regime. Perhaps most perceptibly in the case of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, auxiliary forms of street art facilitated communication and organisation amongst movement adherents. Under the repressive conditions that characterised the more or less concurrent authoritarian periods in the three states, street art was also employed by activists on the basis of its belligerent and transformative psychosocial possibilities; its ability to signal to the regime and to broader society that an active opposition persisted and remained a viable threat to the status quo.

Notably, street art's offerings under democratic governance are harder to classify, not in the least because 'democracy' is itself a contested and imprecise category; with the basic procedural requirements stating nothing of the social, economic and geographical obstacles to participation nor the full range and modes of power that might be employed. The cases evaluated in this thesis exemplify the variety of ways and purposes that street art has been and might be employed under 'formal democratic government'; its possibilities for pro-system and anti-system campaigns, its functions as an expressive medium and as a means of interrupting or neutralising prominent visualities. Unfortunately, in current political practice, the label 'formal democratic government' is readily conferred upon any state able to demonstrate that it can hold multi-party elections that are relatively free from interference. In the academy it has become increasingly common to make use of a multi-faceted definition which takes into account (at a minimum) the following requisites: regular free and fair elections; universal suffrage; accountability of state administration to elected officials and

freedom of political expression. However, it is questionable as to how many modern democracies truly fit this model, particularly in its two latter requirements.

Excepting the most repressive periods of rule, street art has gradually come to be deployed by a more diverse and comprehensive range of political actors in Argentina, Brazil and Bolivia. The story of its evolution and development in each of the studies points to its transition away from an elite medium as it has increasingly been exploited by newly formed, under-funded and under-represented groups seeking to enter the public discourse. As a low technology mode of mass communication politically committed street art can be cheap and relatively simple to produce, making it one of the more accessible modes of expression for the otherwise excommunicated. Crucially, it can be argued that street art, in its plurality, is a ‘democratising’ medium, in that it arguably moves states closer to the requirements of the latter, more comprehensive model of democratic politics mentioned above. In its different forms, political street art has long provided an extra-institutional channel by which citizens; rich or poor, literate or not, can find a means by which to communicate their concerns about the practices of the government and wider political class.

With this in mind and with certain reservations drawn from the intentional fallacy and problems of affective capture, it can also be argued persuasively that the presence of political street art may provide scholars with a reasonable source of a popular social history and a key indicator as to the possibilities for contentious action at given moments in historical time. As evidenced from the research undertaken in Brazil, Bolivia and Argentina, graffitied inscriptions, wall-paintings, murals, posters and auxiliary forms of political street art can serve as a mirror and even a barometer of societal sentiment. In the first instance, the discursive and thematic content of such interventions often reveals a great deal about the nature of societal grievances as well as the ways in which movements seek to frame their

claims and objections. Meanwhile, the continuous acts of appropriation, innovation, subversion and re-appropriation of the means *and* themes in public discourse exemplify street art as kind of passage or vessel for cultural evolution.

McLuhan's suggestion that it is not what is said but what resources are used to say it, has prompted an examination of what it means to employ street art as a medium. In the cases under study in this dissertation, street art's very presence, its concentration and the particularities of its form can convey important information about the socio-political context and matrix of political opportunities. For instance, in all three of the Latin American countries discussed, urban visual landscapes were dramatically altered by the repressive context of the military dictatorships as 'fear' invoked by the violence of the merciless regimes led to a sharp decline and modal shift in oppositional interventions. The use of street art by those active in association with the *Círculo 70* in Bolivia, as well as the early interventions of *Tupinãodá* in Brazil and the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* in Argentina certainly tended towards what James Scott distinguishes as infrapolitics; those veiled or anonymous acts of protestation that shield activists from reprisal. As such, unattributable, unsophisticated and pre-prepared interventions emerged most frequently when the stakes were high.

Not only can the characteristics of political street art transmit important information about the environmental matrix and possibilities for resistance, they can also feed into these possibilities. As evidenced in each of the aforementioned cases, street art actions, conceived of as acts of infrapolitics, can help activists to generate collective critical understandings and dissenting behaviours out of the view of the authorities. Resultantly, the production and dissemination of political street art can contribute in important ways to both the generation and survival of resistance movements in authoritarian contexts.

Importantly, the research presented here supports a much bolder claim about the ways that street art interventions work over people, feed into and transform the social milieu. It suggests that street art functions in ways that depend upon both the cognate and the sensate; the strategic and the impulsive. This insight has important implications for how scholars understand framing as an ideological practice, as well as the ways and means by which aesthetic expression can function as a heuristic and rehabilitative force.

On the one hand, it is argued that only by altering perceptions *and* feelings can street art interventions successfully feed interpretations, reframe key issues, actors and even physical spaces. Referring to a persuasive device used to fix particular meanings, organise experience and guide action, framing depends upon both the broader system of system of culture as well as localised, agentic interpretations and initiatives. Frames are developed by political agents to focus the attention of a target audience on specific dimensions of a conflict or to project particular ways of understanding an issue or situation. In all three of the countries studied here, early discourses around the power of art in revolution were shaped in part by the regional activities of the Mexican muralists, particularly Riveira, Siquieros and Orozco. Notably, street art interventions also materialised in a close symbiotic relation with pro-system art and other institutionally backed interventions. Resultantly, in Bolivia, Argentina and Brazil, practices of appropriation and re-appropriation in the modes and thematic content of politically committed street art have been commonplace throughout the past century. Artist-activists have repeatedly and deliberately drawn upon and updated existing the cultural stock. They have experimented with and innovated around the use of media; they have invoked shared meanings, recognised symbols and traditional practices in order to orient their street art interventions for maximum discursive and emotional resonance.

The research presented here suggests that street art's function as a framing or counter-framing device is contingent not only on its empirical commensurability and cognitive

resonance but also on its ability to invoke, shift and harness affective intensities. It is argued that materiality, cognition and affect form a complementary triangle that may function variously to facilitate or obstruct action and understanding in the social world. In the first instance, adherence to this view requires some degree of faith because affect, in its very nature defies classification or observation, existing in an invisible plane yet variously infusing all human encounters. However, for those who cannot easily put their faith in invisible processes and extra-material forces, affect's effects are perhaps best indicated in some of the anomalies and mysteries that 'gum up' efforts at guiding and predicting human behaviour. Moreover, affect provides epistemological grounds to consider the expressive paralysis sometimes felt when one experiences a traumatic or exciting event, as well as the sense of 'intrinsic value' that human beings tend to ascribe to works of art.

Taking these insights a step further, I suggest that affect's effects are also apparent in street art's emergence during the periods of representative crisis and turmoil that have sometimes assailed societies, catching people off-guard and challenging their capacities to define and translate events. Aesthetic responses can emerge as citizens grapple with available ways of organising information and processing change, suggesting that there are some 'interior things' that are more easily addressed and expressed in recourse to the visual than the linguistic. Here we can also speak of affective encounters through street art that can "reset social territoriality" (Longoni 2007), that can literally shock people into action, forcing them to abandon their caution and even prompting them to reconsider their positions and responsibilities *vis a vis* society. In a context where a rationalised fear was the main paralysing factor for much of society, many of the exemplary actions of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* were driven by an insuperable anguish at the loss of their loved ones rather than cogent political calculation. Actions undertaken during the *siluetazo* in 1983 illustrate the ways in which street art has visually altered spaces that have in turn altered moods and corresponding

socio-political conduct. Interestingly too, stencil artists operating in the context of the 2001 peso crisis and its aftermath describe an almost contagious compulsion to paint and allude to the ways in which producing political street art enabled them to re-imagine their social functions and responsibilities as citizens, turning them into protagonists. In Brazil, the *Tupinãodá* activists refer to an uncontrollable outpouring of feeling, which determined the range and scope of their artistic interventions in the wake of transition. During the interviews conducted for this thesis, waves of articulation were quite often described by the activists themselves in terms that point toward the unprocessed or non-rationalised. This fact alone justifies a thorough re-examination of the social movement literature and the ways in which it currently deals with the topics of feeling and agency.

6.3 Locating International Relations

The conclusions of this project are relevant to the field of International Relations for a variety of reasons; not in the least because a closer understanding of the dynamics and processes that lead to or inhibit political and social change at the domestic level necessarily have global consequences, either through foreign policy initiatives or through learning activities that traverse borders. Importantly, affect- mood, impulse, energy- can also traverse national borders. It can, for example, ‘gum up’ the appeal and uptake of nationalist discourses. Moreover, it can upset attempts to model human behaviour along the lines of ‘rational action’, a concept which many social scientists continue to unquestioningly import from economic theory and deploy in ways that smooth over the complexities inherent to human agency. As such, granting growth space to a fuller range of knowledge practices and critical approaches that can shed some light on the challenges of discursive uptake and the limits of objectivity remains an important task for the discipline of International Relations, in its efforts to identify and illuminate the locations of ‘politics’ in all its manifestations.

Following the very same objective, this project also seeks to tackle the broader problems of conceit and segregation that currently and unrelentingly assail the discipline of International Relations. As alluded to in the introduction to this dissertation, there is a particular politics of exclusion at play in IR whereby concerns with the ‘high politics’ of security, law and diplomacy still dominate agendas and replay a dichotomy infused with patriarchal tropes, commissions and omissions. In today’s context of widespread economic crisis, budget cuts and fiscal tightening, patriarchal imperatives may be easily obscured by institutional drives and financial pressures to be seen as ‘policy relevant’, read in terms of the ‘objective’, ‘rationalizable’ and ‘discretely measurable’.

Of course, patriarchy is not the only regressive force that we should be concerned about today. Affect has often been hailed for its emancipatory possibilities- an important caveat though, is that affect is neither inherently emancipatory, nor innately good. It is a neutral and moldable potential that may be harnessed by progressive or regressive forces or indeed something in between the two. When collectively processed as a critical mass of anger or discontent, affective intensity may even spill over into violence. A present and current danger in Europe is that in so many places the financial crisis and accompanying austerity packages have defied comprehension and violated trust. There is a collective sense of something gone awry, but living memory, current governments and established institutional channels do not (in some cases perhaps deliberately) easily provide the categories and tools for processing what went wrong. In many places street art interventions, community muralism and other forms of collaborative project have emerged as people have tried to find another way of dealing with the fallout and expressing feelings not yet made sense of. However, in other instances we see this affective intensity harnessed by the symbolism of more xenophobic forces, culminating in the rise of groups like *Chrisi Avyi* (Golden Dawn) in Greece. A more aesthetically informed approach to International Relations could certainly assist scholars

seeking to understand the varied reactions and patterns of mobilisation that have emerged in response to recent events in Europe.

Although the research presented here revolves around case studies that are delimited by time and space, a quotient of external validity is by no means ruled out. Whilst declaring his adherence to a postmodern conviction that there is no social location from which the truth-value of a text or discourse may be evaluated, J.C.Scott (1992) also argued that structurally similar modes of domination could give rise to broadly comparable patterns of resistance. A similar conviction animates this piece of work, which seeks to strike a balance between approaches that smooth over cultural differences and ones that project a false uniqueness.

In terms of the latter danger, a key case in point is the wave of uprisings that spread across countries in North Africa and the Middle East in 2011. These events, which have been dubbed by political commentators and media pundits as ‘the Arab Spring’, were accompanied by a huge outpouring of low technology street art that was very quickly transported around the globe by virtue of the high technology electronic medium we call the internet. The street art interventions from the Arab Uprising have been described as “*revolutionary in the most literal sense*” (Feldman 2012) in that they were “*...made by participants in active revolt against regimes that were successfully swept away*”(ibid.). Media representations of Arab revolutionary art have been absolutely staggering in their frequency and whilst this has done a great deal to demonstrate the power of art in resistance, Middle East scholar Charles Tripp (2012) pertinently notes that there is a risk that the glut of electronically transmitted images creates an impression that we are seeing this relationship between art and power for the first time. In other words, it generates a sense that the Arab Spring represents something of a ‘year zero’ for political street art. This dissertation not only demonstrates the error of such a conjecture, it also offers some insights as to what activists and social theorists might expect

from street art as a contentious performance, as well what they might not.

6.4 Concluding remarks

In sum, this dissertation makes a novel contribution to the discipline of International Relations and the associated field of social movement scholarship by developing an ‘affect-informed political process theory’ that attends to theoretical and empirical gaps that were identified in the introductory chapters. In the first instance, by exploring the activities of artist-activist collectives employing street art under different modes of government and degrees of representation it addresses the existing lack of attention to activist practices under authoritarianism as well as the under-examination of aesthetic experience in contentious politics. Appropriating, reworking and extending McLuhan’s insights from media and communications studies, the project also demonstrates how street art as a medium can reveal important details about the possibilities for resistance and can indeed re-disclose them. Coupled with the incorporation of Scott’s concept of infrapolitics, it thus extends current work around the ideas of political opportunity structures. Additionally, the project resists the compulsive tendency toward reductive positivistic explanatory models and carries forward new possibilities for exploration of the potentials and specificities at the level of the contentious performance by incorporating affect into its explanatory framework. In this way it pushes an ethic and agenda of greater meta-theoretical and thematic inclusiveness for the study of social and political change and for social movement theory in particular.

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Plate 4 Graffiti in chalk deployed by Ze Carratu and Milton Sogabe.

Prades, J (1983). Photograph (*reproduced with owner's permission*)

Plate 5 An early stencil by Milton Sogabe.

Prades, J (1983). Photograph (*reproduced with owner's permission*)

Plate 6 “*uma negra*” (a negress) by Jaime Prades

Prades, J (1983). Photograph (*reproduced with owner's permission*)

Plate 7 “*A Bandeira*” (The Flag) by *Grupo Tupinãodá*

Prades, J (1985). Photograph (*reproduced with owner's permission*)

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Prades, J (1988). Photograph (*reproduced with owner's permission*)
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Prades, J (1988). Photograph (*reproduced with owner's permission*)
- Plate 11** ***“Murales de Ayllu de Warisata” (Murals from the Schoool of Warisata) by Yllanes, M (1934) Tempura***
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Ryan, H (2011) Photograph
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ST (2011). Photograph (*reproduced with owner’s permission*)
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Plate 29 “*El Siluetazo*”.

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Plate 30 “*Un Desaparecido*” (A disappeared person).

Hazenberg (1983). Photograph (*reproduced from the Hazenberg-Quaretti archive with owner’s permission*)

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Plate 34 Bush/Mickey Mouse Stencil by *BS.AS.Stencil*.

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