

# SOCIAL AESTHETICS: OLD AND NEW MAKINGS IN CHILE'S STREET ART

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## **Abstract**

This article problematizes the resonance of divisions such as professional/amateur or art/craft in the context of contemporary street art in Chile, a set of practices that provides an interesting window to explore issues of self-organization and new models of making in a country that is usually hailed as one the most successful economy in the region. It uses the recent 'blinking out' of the Mapocho river's bank (that for decades has been a favoured canvas for street artists), which aimed to provide a neutral background for a light art project carried out by established artists –the *Museo Arteluz*—, as the space to articulate this discussion.

It focuses in the recent 'wave' of street artists rather than in the groups that operated during the dictatorship of General Pinochet (1973-1989). These newer groups and individuals such as Bomber West, Charqui Punk, Dana Pink, and Ritalin Crew promote their work directly as art in social media; their commitment to politics is evident in their allusions to issues such as the conflict with the *Mapuches* (Chile's indigenous population) but they are not linked to any political party; while being informed by Latin American references and imaginary, they also draw on European influences and North American (especially West Coast) art and music.

The article explores three main topics to illuminate their modes of production and values. First, whereas the old 'brigades' had a very strategic organization in order to favour speed of creation, contemporary groups have created new roles such as managing their on-line presence through Flickr, funding, networking, etc. Second, it situates these practices in relation to the Chilean art scene of established commercial galleries and public institutions, which, in spite of a perceived process of internationalization, continues to be fairly unfunded and lacks curatorial rigor. Lastly, it argues that this street art has articulated a critique of the loss of traditional ways of making and provided an alternative to the dominant modernizing discourse of Chilean mainstream media and politics, while maintaining an elusive space. In December 2010 the Mapocho river, which crosses the city of Santiago (Chile's capital) and for decades has been a favoured canvas for street artists given that is dry for a significant part of the year, was 'blacked out' of its art, bringing about memories of a previous erasure in 1973, the first year of Pinochet's dictatorship; during that time the erasure inaugurated a new era of political repression and its corresponding clean, controlled and sober aesthetic. This second time around the blinking out was aimed to provide a neutral background for a light art project carried out by established artists –the *Museo Arteluz* [Light Art Museum]—, commissioned by the Santiago commune and sponsored by the millionaires Chilectra, Endesa and Enersis electricity companies. The project's original idea was to illuminate one kilometre of the Mapocho for four hours, seven nights a week, for 6 months, a significant expenditure of electricity, at around the same time in which power supplies in Chile had become an urgent ecological issue, given Endesa's plans to significantly altered the Chilean Patagonia by building hydroelectric dams on its rivers, plans that provoked the widely supported *Patagonia Chilena ¡Sin Represas!* (Chilean Patagonia: Without Dams!) campaign. Since then the project has had different incarnations and the riverbank has become a semi-permanent space for the exhibition of light-based art.

The so called 'graffiticide' (Mutate Britain, 2011) of 2010 erased the iconic work from 2009 *Pobreza Material, Riqueza Espiritual* [Material Poverty, Spiritual Wealth] by the duo Aislap, and several pieces by artists such Saile, Piguán and Grin, amongst others. Some voices –such as that of Pablo Aravena,

director of the film *Next: A Primer on Urban Painting* (2005) or Sebastian Cuevas (2011)—raised criticisms of the erasure but no real debate about it ever happened. At a certain point the street artists were offered to paint something in black and white so that it would not interfere with the *Museo Arteluz*, described by Catalina Rojas, the main artist featured in the project, as ‘*muralismo de luz*’ [muralismo of light] but the option was disregarded.

Given that impermanence and ephemerality are key dimensions usually attributed to street art (Schacter 2008), the sense of discomfort provoked by the blanking out of the river is worth exploring, particularly when the works were replaced by a form of art that is not supposed to stay either: Catalina Rojas’ muralism is a temporally display, intrinsically light in its immateriality, a projected, shiny surface without the visible material depth of the multiple layers of paint sedimented since the 1970s, when the Mapocho river started to be a precious site for street artists in Santiago alongside its historical and documented importance as both a public space (Castillo Fernández, 2014) and a shelter for street children and criminals, masterly exposed in the classic 1960s novel *El Río* (Gomez Morel, 1997) and in more recent studies about the different waves of informal housing that have grown organically on its banks (Muñoz Zuñiga, 2006). This erasure and ‘start from scratch’ approach of the museum organisers also mirrors the vertiginous changes that Chile has experienced also since the 1970s, when the country adopted a virtually unregulated free market economy to replace its old state-centred policies, a change that not only reorganised the country’s public health and education systems but also dramatically altered the material infrastructure and the urban fabric of its main cities, which have seen buildings and houses rapidly being demolished to favour high rise construction, shopping malls and contemporary architecture.

By exploring the dynamics between the material and the intangible in the context of professional versus non professional art, this article discusses how the position of street artists in Chile speaks of wider tensions and contradictions between old and new ways of making in the country. Based on content analysis of the artworks and on artists’ statements, it follows Adam Arvidsson’s understanding of “*ethical*” economies (2006, 2008) to propose that a new measure of value is needed to address these practices.

### Street Art in Chile

The publication of Rod Palmer’s visual book *Chile Street Art* (2008) drew some attention to the extremely prolific street art scene in the country, later described by Herve Chandès—director of the Cartier Foundation in Paris, which hosted the exhibition *Born in the Streets: Graffiti* in 2009—as one of two most important graffiti capitals in the world, the other being Sao Paulo (for the purposes of this paper I am going to use the term ‘street art’ because it embraces all forms of art produced by street artists in Chile, which includes paintings, posters, stickers, murals, stencils and graffiti). Palmer is an art historian, writer, photographer and critic, and also a street art aficionado, and that is palpable in his visual celebration of Chilean street art through a visually striking book primarily aimed at documenting and recording a scene previously unknown to European audiences. He regards the scene as an egalitarian space to affirm political and personal freedoms: “...*without ever taking ever taking itself too seriously, and careless that its filthier jobs might offend, Chilean street art creates an exhilarating sur-reality ‘within the reach of all’*” (Palmer 2008, 18).

*Chile Street Art* is arguably the most well known out of a constellation of books devoted to different forms of contemporary street art, mural paintings, political posters and other manifestations of urban graphic work in Chile, most of them edited by the publisher Ocho Libros, based in Santiago. Examples of editorial projects by Ocho Libros include Eduardo Castillo Espinoza’s *Puño y Letra: Movimiento Social y Comunicación Gráfica en Chile* (2006), which takes a historical approach to discuss political graphic communication more broadly; Mario Osses and Mauricio Vicio’s *Un Grito en la Pared: Psicodelia, Compromiso Político y Exilio en el Cartel Chileno* (2009), devoted to the production of propaganda posters in Chile between the years 1967 and 1988 in relation to social, political and cultural changes in the country; and Patricio Rodríguez Plaza’s *Pintura Callejera Chilena: Manufactura Estética y Provocación Teórica* (2011), about muralism in Chile from 1963 to the contemporary scene. There is also *Santiago*

*Stencil* by Edwin Campos and Alan Meller (2007), edited by a different publisher and centred on the capital only. Beyond the celebratory and positive tone of most of these publications, I would like to draw attention to another aspect of this prolific art scene, by placing it in relation to other forms of art production in Chile, exploring the tensions and contradictions of their respective positions and opening it to the exploration of issues of self-organization and new models of making in a country that is usually hailed as one of the most successful economies in the region.

In Chile, as in the rest of the Western world, the boundaries between legal and illegal street artwork are increasingly blurred, a division that, as Merrill argues (2015), has never been clearly cut anyway. Graffiti and street art more generally now sit comfortably alongside other forms of artistic production in mainstream spaces and could be equally affected by commercial issues, market trends, sponsorship deals and others. For instance, the largest street art festival in Europe is organised annually in Bristol (coincidentally, the home town of Banksy, the street artist whose work is most highly regarded by the art market), with income generated by a mixture of sales, private sponsorship and public funds; in 2008 the Tate Modern in London commissioned six street artists from different countries to use its iconic river side façade for an exhibition; in recent years, the large gallery space maintained by CCU in Chile, a multinational beverages company which also collects Chilean contemporary art, hosted the urban art show *Cinco trazos, experiencias de arte urbano*; the touring festival *Kosmopolite Art Tour* was held precisely in Santiago in 2016.

According to Anna Waclawek (2011), this 'mainstreamization' and commercialization goes back to the 1970s and 1980s in New York, where art galleries attempted to de-criminalise street artworks by signalling them as 'art', a joint effort of artists themselves, dealers and gallerists; the creation of the North American organization United Graffiti Artists (UGA) in 1972 is part of this process. The usual comments about street artists 'selling out' for these ventures are clearly put forward by Maryose Fison (2015) in her recent CNN article 'Graffiti artists the new ad men: why business is booming for muralists' about the growing trend towards the commercialization of underground culture in Santiago, with street artists getting commissions by restaurants, hostels and shops, and money from government funds. Yet, as I have argued elsewhere in relation to other forms of amateur or non-professional art (Vodanovic 2013), there is still a separation between these practices and 'regular' or mainstream art, even if this distinction is only a figure of thought or a rhetoric tool. Critiques such as Fison's –and also Palmer's celebration of street art—precisely indicate that the work of self-taught artists or people working in the margins of legality is still expected to provide a form of resistance to mainstream practices and to be associated with a tactile, poetic dimension of the everyday.

Indeed, Stephen Knott (2015) has argued that amateur practices and spaces do not constitute a refuge of capitalism, yet, being complex and ambiguous, could challenge or subvert some of its structures: "*It is a space for critical thinking and allows forms of practice that are freer than most forms of labour work or organisation, yet at the same time does not constitute a blatant threat to the interests of capital*" (Knott, 2015: 46). Given that in Knott's argument amateurism is a permeable category within capitalist production, it can relate to other spaces of capitalism (work spaces, for instance, or domestic life), an approach that suits the thinking about Chilean street art work in relation to the professional scene.

The assumed ephemerality of street art and its opposite (the presumed permanence of mainstream art) is another important dimension of the literature about it that resonates with the tensions between permanence and impermanence of the art in the river, and with the fact that both of them draw from similar images of natural landscapes and aboriginal communities, somehow alluding to an idea of the 'timeless' vernacular in the country. It would be simplistic to suggest that street artworks should be immediately considered as having cultural importance in terms of heritage and preserved as such, a suggestion already contested by Merrill (2015), who argues that any attempt to integrate graffiti and street art into heritage frameworks would undermine their authenticity. In a similar vein, recent research by Catherine Burdick and Fanny Canessa Vicencio (2015) about political graffiti on heritage sites, which coincidentally uses a Chilean example –the graffiti at the Iglesia de San Francisco in Santiago, a national

monument from the colonial period which is already indexed on the tentative list of UNESCO heritage sites—has started to question a notion of graffiti as “*contaminating*” heritage, yet their writing is specific to the particular issues raised when executing this kind of works at places officially designated as heritage. Additionally, the bulk of their research focuses on responses from churchgoers, passers by and tourists, the audience of the work and their (mostly negative) feelings towards it. Whereas my focus here resides on the organization of artists themselves and their values rather than on the public responses to their work, I share the authors’ interest on the current scholarship about material and intangible heritage to address some key issues of Chilean contemporary street art.

### **From *Brigadas* to Crews**

Most artists featured in Palmer’s book belong to the generation of young people in Chile who started to be more vocal about the flaws and exclusions of the country’s widely praised political, social and economic model, and to demand changes broader than those only slowly brought about by the transition to democracy, a process that started in 1989 with the end of the dictatorship of General Pinochet. This recent ‘wave’ of street artists is fairly different to those groups that operated during the dictatorship like *Ramona Parra* (BRP), even though artists in the group acknowledge their influence and some of the older ones had their first ‘painting’ experiences with them which suggests a certain continuity or lineage. Pussyz Soul Food (PSF), for instance, recalls growing up in her parent’s exile home in Europe surrounded by reproductions of murals by BRP. *Ramona Parra* was a *brigada* linked to the Chilean Communist Party that has exerted great influence on the contemporary scene yet had a different agenda. As Ana Longoni (1999, 26) discusses, BRP created an elaborate, ephemeral visual language, which was “*collective, urban, anonymous and ephemeral, carried out quickly and furtively, and without any pretension toward longevity, produced (initially) by militants, non-artists, and conceived not as art but as a tool of propaganda and political agitation*”. Conversely, newer groups and individuals such as Bomber West, Charqui Punk, Dana Pink, Elodio, Inti, Piguán, Pussyz Soul Food and Ritalin Crew, are less interested in furtiveness and promote their work directly as art; their commitment to politics is evident in their allusions to current issues such as the conflict with the *Mapuches* (Chile’s indigenous population) but they are not linked to any political party; while being informed by Latin American references and imaginary, they also draw on European influences (Picasso, Barcelona street art, Gilbert and George...) and North American (especially West Coast) art and music.

Street art in Chile has been encouraged since the early 1960s, a time of rapid change in Chilean society during which the foundations of the socialist government of president Salvador Allende (1970-1973) were laid out; in material terms, the new political project stimulated a visual equivalent on the very fabric of the city, aligning a new society with a new person and a new visual landscape (Trumper 2016). Even Roberto Matta, the well known Chilean surrealist, did some sporadic work with the *brigadas*, which “*claimed the urban landscape as a central pillar of political participation and communication, a democratic space where citizens across class, race and gender became politicized, participatory citizens engaging left- and right-wing party media and messages...*” (Trumper 2005: 145). With the military *coup* in 1973 a new process of “*reconstrucción cultural*” or cultural reconstruction arrived: as Luis Errázuriz and Gonzalo Quijada Leiva describe, the dictatorship also started a cultural purge based on a “*disinfection*” of “*unwanted elements*” such as books –which were burned during raids to houses, universities and different organisations—, leaflets, street art and, more generally, the cultural fabric that had resulted from the country’s recent socialist past, to be replaced by a new military imaginary (2012, 14). This so called “*operación limpieza*” [‘purging operation’] aimed at “*disinfecting*” the aesthetic of the recent Marxist past and promoting a military dimension in the material culture of the everyday (Errázuriz and Quijada Leiva 2012, 127). The brigades –forced to become clandestine during the dictatorship—eventually became structured in three main ones: *Brigada Ramona Parra* (linked to the Chilean communist party), and *Brigadas Elmo Catalán* and *Inti Peredo* (linked to the socialist one). Because of their furtive state, they worked within a very strategic organization in order to favour speed of creation, based on *trazadores*, who outlined the

letters and images (the most difficult role, and the one that all aspire to eventually do); *fondeadores* who painted the background; *rellenadores* who filled in the image; *fileteadores* who add contours; and *retocadores* who retouch it (Kunzle 1978: 362-63).

Contemporary street art groups have replaced the *brigada* as the central unit for the more contemporary 'crew', described, in words of Charquipunk, as "*la familia que tiene tu mismo humor y entiende tus ideas*" ['the family who has your same sense of humour and share your ideas']. Charquipunk, quoted in Palmer, mentions that the contemporary scene is essentially collective, yet also very strongly differentiates from the previous collectivism of *Ramona Parra*, which used to have an elected leader and a very clear plans before their actions. The contemporary groups have maintained some of these divisions between drawers, fillers and the rest, yet also created new roles such as managing their on-line presence through Flickr and other forms of social media, funding, networking, etc. A number of them were also involved in a shop and on-line retail space, *La Otra Vida* [The Other Life] and generally show great entrepreneurial skills by maintaining a network of relations both domestically and internationally (most notoriously with the Brazilian street art scene), accepting commissions, seeking permission to paint certain walls (while also being committed to non-authorized work) and sometimes showcasing their work in mainstream galleries spaces. The scale of this entrepreneurial spirit is well exemplified by the mural painted [Santiago's](#) central railway station, a project of Mutay Crew that involved a group of 300 artists to paint a wall almost one kilometer long, overcoming a number of bureaucratic hurdles and bringing both their local authority and private funders to the project (Lindsay 2010).

These contemporary units seem to have a much more diffused sense of membership and commonality than previous ones, with members switching between different groups and painting together or separate depending on the project. Their own individual identity is also a permanent source of ambiguity: their names, for instance, often point towards radically different directions (Charquipunk, for example, brings together the word *charqui*, dried horse meat usually chewed up in Northern Chilean towns, with the subcultures of big metropolises; the Robot de Madera is a male artist who uses a female name meaning 'a wooden robot', which in itself is also an unfeasible creation). There is certainly an element of postmodern pastiche in this eclecticism, yet also a more profound ambiguity and a refusal to adopt a more defined identity, a key difference between them and the previous brigades. Whereas Ramona Parra, for instance, would always put a black *filete* [fillet] to finish their works, contemporary artists switch between media and styles according to materials available, if they are working on a commission or if it is an illegal or an authorized piece. Another favoured gesture is the doubled meaning of many of these crews names, either in English, Spanish or both: CWP (Children with Problems/Chile Wild Productions); DVE (De la Vieja Escuela, 'Old School', which at times also becomes Deskiziada Vida Escritora, a name that does not make much sense but alludes to something like a mad written life, a crazy yet fully experienced and narrated existence). The anonymity of some artists such as Juana Perez -who adopted a name usually regarded in Chile as the most common possible, almost a form of no name—somehow contradicts their efforts at tagging their work, establishing certain territories. A similar ambiguity also exists in the work itself and in their somehow contradictory messages: messages such as "Apaguen los televisores para encender tu vida" ('turn off the TV to turn on your life) are combined with a celebration of cartoons and characters from Nickelodeon.

### **Making and Makers**

Statements of Chilean street artists suggest that ephemerality agrees with their art, and that their main gesture is the act of 'making' rather than the permanence of their work, despite the recent problematizations of this in Chile and abroad, either through the capitalizations of Banksy and other successful artists, or through projects such as the Museo a Cielo Abierto [Open Air Museum] in the San Miguel borough of Santiago, which assumes a certain permanence (at least relative) of the murals. This commitment to ephemerality may appear at odds with the desire to preserve the art of the river, yet rather

than preserving the untouched work itself the desire seems to be to maintain both the physical space to produce it and the ways of making that inform these artists' practice.

It seems useful to discuss this experiential form of preservation by looking at the work that Laurajane Smith (2006) has done about intangible heritage (which I have used before to explore issues of identity and informal heritage), placed amongst the growing interdisciplinary body of writing that challenge traditional frameworks in heritage studies and bring notions of dissonance, intangibility and others to the discussion. Her work and that of Akagawa and Smith (2009) seem to be particularly pertinent because of their focus on heritage as a process rather than as a physical object or building, which avoids, as Harvey (2001) would put it, the consideration of heritage as "*a given*". Smith postulates that heritage is a "*cultural and social process, which engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present*" (2006, 2). Without negating or devaluing the material form of heritage artefacts, the author's key premise is that all heritage is intangible, in other words, that these artefacts are meaningful because of the cultural processes and activities that take place around them (she uses the example of Stonehenge: without the meanings attributed to the site, and the cultural practices that take place in and celebrate it, it could be simply described as a group of rocks arranged in a particular disposition). Additionally, heritage institutions do not simply 'find' a site that merits to be protected and conserved; "*...heritage is heritage because it is subjected to the management and preservation/conservation process, not simply because it 'is'*" (Smith 2006, 3). This is a "*constitutive cultural process that identifies those things and places that can be given meaning and value as 'heritage', reflecting contemporary cultural and social values, debates and aspirations*" (Smith 2006, 3). As a result, heritage cannot be just defined as grand, monumental and aesthetically pleasant sites and buildings that would be 'pass on' to the future but rather as a "*set of values and meanings*" constructed and regulated by cultural practices (Smith 2006, 11).

Smith also identifies a tension between this intangibility of heritage and the actual and physical things called 'heritage', a tension that, nonetheless, she considers as the central aspect of heritage (2006, 74). The physicality of heritage may suggest a sense of changeless values and meanings, yet these are constantly renegotiated in the creation of a "*place*" –the positioning of "*ourselves as a nation, community or individual*" (Smith 2006, 75) and the negotiation of our community identity. To that extent, "*heritage is about a sense of place*", which explain why heritage studies are increasingly favoured the term "*place*" instead of the notion of "*site*" (which is inherited from archaeology); place is a more fluid concept and more directly linked to the construction of identity and a sense of belonging (Smith 2006, 75-76).

It is important to note that Smith's argument distances itself from UNESCO's definition of intangible heritage, another essential framework for discussions within heritage studies since the 2003 *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, which looks after the "means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage" (UNESCO 2003, 2). Intangible heritage includes, for instance, oral traditions and expressions (including language), rituals and festivals, traditional craftsmanship and other forms of cultural and social practice. The difference is that, according to Smith, all heritage is intangible (not just a portion of it) and therefore intangible heritage is not the 'other' of mainstream heritage, which in the case of UNESCO would be the 1972 *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* concerning monuments, groups of buildings and sites, because all heritage is defined as such by a number of cultural and social values that are intangible; if anything, the discussions generated by the 2003 *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* have made more apparent that the values that frame an artefact or practice as 'heritage' are not universal and therefore that the "*idea of intangible heritage forces a recognition of the inherent dissonant nature of heritage because of the immediacy of its production and consumption*" (Akagawa and Smith 2009, 5). This understanding of heritage as cultural practice resonates with, for instance, the work of Harvey, who argues that heritage should not be identified with a noun but rather with "*a process, or a verb, related to human action and*

*agency*" (2001, 327), emphasising that heritage has to do with practices of making and therefore that is constantly produced and consumed. Similarly, Smith and Waterton (2009, 292) suggest that heritage should not be determined by its materiality or non-materiality, "*but rather by what is done with it*". Indeed, the intangible is not less real or material than the tangible (Smith and Waterton 2009, 292).

This "*process*" quality of heritage appears to give an appropriate frame to street art practices in the river because it allows for negotiations in the ways of knowing and seeing a place (like the Mapocho river or other) that are not necessarily homogenous or consensual and therefore might be challenged by subaltern groups attempting to redefine imposed values and identities (Smith 2006, 4). Even if this process permits loss (as Merrill proposes) and rethinks preservation, the blanking out of the river banks still assaults the layers of street art practices that create that space, not as a strictly defined object but as a practice.

### **Pro-Ams and Semi-Pros**

The fact that the Chilean artists crews are self-organised and not primarily driven by monetary aims (despite the fact that some of their work is commissioned and paid for) signal that their practices could be acknowledged as a form of coproduction, an understanding of cultural production as being primarily a social phenomenon. Even though marketing and branding have established coproduction as a fundamental principle of contemporary economies –which, in practical terms, indicates how consumers are increasingly involved (consciously or not) in the production of values for brands, designs strategies and product development, amongst others—authors such as Adam Arvidsson (2008), whose work is framed precisely in those contexts, have explored how social production is also a principle present in other areas such as fan culture and social entrepreneurship, and even in some realms completely removed from new media and technologies, such as community-based agriculture (326). Indeed, the author's argument is that people have always coproduced the social value of goods, a process that was only "discovered" and started to be used by marketing and brand management in the post war years (Arvidsson 2006, 2008). What interests Arvidsson is that these practices have established their own system of values, which the author terms as "*ethical economy*": an economy where "*socially recognized self-expression is the main motivation and community contribution is the main measure of value*" (Arvidsson 2008, 327). Contemporary street artists in Chile appear to place great importance to the construction of new forms of social relations, which is expressed, for instance, both in their constant coupling and re-couplings with other members, and in their engagement with the local communities in which they practice their art. Arvidsson also addresses the crucial element of the immaterial aspects of their production discussed earlier: in his account, social production "*consists in the self-organized systems of (mostly immaterial) production...*" (Arvidsson 2008: 326), with communities driven by a "*socially recognized self-realization*" (Arvidsson 2008, 333). This points towards a particular combination of values that might be considered paradoxical: players of the ethical economy are both oriented towards community sharing and, at the same time, to the quest of self interest (Arvidsson 2008, 333). Linux is one of the examples used by the author to illustrate this point about values: coders give their time and programming skills to Linux for free because they want to feel closer to that communities and to the values of free source embodied by the organisation while, at the same time, they seek their own realisation as individuals. Therefore the values of their practice reside in the creation of the software but also in the intangible reward gained while doing so.

While most Chilean street artists would describe their position as post-political, their work expresses an obvious commitment to denounce social issues in an open way, significantly more directly than in the established scene of art galleries and museums in Chile, which has been described as cerebral, analytic and mostly conceptual, sometimes at the expense of the visual aspect of the works (Mosquera 2006, 32). This established scene, which today flirts closely with the aesthetics of consumption and advertisement, and the high production values of glossy magazines and design practices, favours a form of oblique critique often characterized by a "*descalce*" [bad fit] and disjuncture (Mosquera 2006) between what they are showing and the supposedly implicit and overt meanings of their work. Conversely, the street art

scene is unequivocal in its solidarity with the struggles of the indigenous communities in the country, which exist in extreme poverty and exclusion as an almost forgotten residue of a pre Spanish past. Some, like Ritalin Crew (active in the southern city of Talcahuano) prefer to denounce the loss of rights for fishermen and farmers, old ways of being and making rapidly replaced by the individualism of Chile's extreme version of the neo-liberal model. Inti's work, for instance, refers to the marginalised indigenous communities of the North of the country, emphasising their connection to domestic farming and their agonising status; other pieces by him show albinos with crutches and other props suggesting their ill state. Orate works with the Patagonia landscape, a territory in dispute because of the recent dam constructions; Cekiz, older and arguably the most influential of the scene, speaks of his condition of Latin American migrant in New York and the longings of this.

These themes would appear in a much more indirect way in the formal art scene in Chile, which, despite its efforts of success and a perceived process of internationalization, continues to be fairly unfunded, and lacks curatorial rigor (Berríos and Machuca 2006). Indeed, the most emblematic street art project, the mentioned Museo a Cielo Abierto or Open Air Museum in San Miguel, is widely regarded in Trip Advisor and similar platforms as the most important art gallery in the country, and a number of tour providers organise visits to the site; this project was driven by the own inhabitants of these blocs and funded by FONDART, exactly the same state funding scheme that is virtually the only source of income for most of the professional artists in the country and that even pays for some of the costs of private galleries (FONDART money has been awarded, for instance, to the London based gallery Cecilia Brunson Projects, to the fund the cost booths in international fairs, catalogues, promotional materials, etcetera, when exhibiting Chilean artists). This points to a certain overlap between both scenes, even though they usually ignore one another and live completely parallel existences, with arguably the only exception being the clash, indirect or no, in the Mapocho river.

It could be argued then the apparent gap between the non professional street art scene in the river bank and the artists identified with the more established scene is indeed misleading: as two consecutive studies commissioned by the Chilean Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y de las Artes (2004, 2012) argue, most of the artists who are active in this formal scene work in "*semi-professional*" conditions, with very little remuneration and in a situation of "*plural employment*", earning, on average, less than the country's minimum wage (conversely, according to the CNN article mentioned above, Alan Zarate's commercial street art generates him a salary of about 750.000 Chilean pesos, that is, about three times the country's minimum wage). A more recent document, *Política de Fomento de las Artes Visuales 2010-2015* (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y de las Artes 2016), reiterates the relevance of the term "*semi-professional*" in the Chilean context; it also defines the 'visual artist' as someone who either earns a living or attempts to do so by producing art (as opposed to those "*vocacionales*" [vocationals] or "*aficionados*"), while continuing to acknowledge that this is virtually not possible in the country (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y de las Artes 2016, 10). It argues that one of the reasons for this is a general lack of social and economic value attributed to the production of art, mostly associated with leisure and free time (Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y de las Artes 2016, 10). It also notes that universities continue to be a significant source of employment for artists, who work as teachers for different institutions; conversely, most of street artists do not work in higher education given that they do not have academic degrees.

This choice of the term "*semi-professional*" in the studies by the Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y de las Artes resonates with other contemporary couplings of professionals and non professionals or amateurs (like the established term "Pro-Am") yet also provides its flip side: in this case, the limitations of the professional dimension of the practice of established Chilean artists is emphasized by the reports as a precarious condition, not far from the productive urgency of the "*thriving on adversity*" that so many times has been used to frame artistic practices in Latin America (Dezeuze 2006; Brett 1989,1990) yet lacking the fecund possibilities implicit in that thriving and pointing towards the struggles of living off multiple jobs and having little or no time to actually produce art. Conversely, many of the positive characteristics of "Pro-Ams" (Leadbeater and Miller 2004) such as the commitment and love for what they do despite not



being labelled as professionals in their fields, their high level of expertise acquired and their entrepreneurial spirit, amongst others, would be fit to describe the values and modes of production of street artists, which might provide another form of *descalce* or bad fit, in this case about the place they occupy. According to Leadbeater and Miller,

*"...[Pro-Ams] have a strong sense of vocation; they use recognised public standards to assess performance and formally validate skills; they form self-regulating communities, which provide people with a sense of community and belonging; they produce non-commodity products and services; they are well versed in a body of knowledge and skill, which carries with it a sense of tradition and identity"* (Leadbeater and Miller 2004, 22).

Previous observations in this article have spoken about street artists' sense of identity (however diffused it might be) and their engagement with their respective communities, both inside the crew itself and with regards to the larger community, as in the example of the open-air museum in San Miguel. Equally relevant is the fact that the acquisition of cultural capital through their shared community practice is what seems to assert the value of their art, which reinforces the social production aspects of their practice: *"[Pro-Ams] enjoy immersion in a body of knowledge held by a community. But it's not just one way. They also like passing it on, being part of a flow of knowledge through a community"* (Leadbeater and Miller 2004, 40). This not only relates to the production and transmission of their knowledge in their own crews or inside the street art scene itself: it is also palpable in their very direct critique of the loss of traditional ways of making in the country, particularly in areas traditionally associated with communal labour, through their visual and verbal references to the abuse of pesticides in the agricultural sector, the industrialization of farming and the arrival of subway services to non capital cities, too expensive to be used by local people.

Given these tensions between old and new ways of making in the country, it is perhaps not surprising that the so called street art capital of Chile is Valparaíso, a port that played a key geopolitical role during the XIX century and later decayed almost to the state of total ruin, a city abandoned by wealth and capitalism which now struggles between its recently declared UNESCO World Heritage Status (granted in 2003), the flood of tourists and visitors that this recognition has generated, and its on-going processes of exclusion, decay and ruination, which perpetuate the port's historical tension between *"fama y olvido"* [fame and oblivion] (Ilabaca 2014). As street artist (or painter, as he much rather call himself) Basko-Vazko—the only one of the Chilean scene included in the Cartier foundation exhibition—describes in a video interview by MOCAtv (2013), Valparaíso used to be the perfect site to go to *"saquear"* or 'loot' (meaning here scrape and paint) and that even now, when there is *"más orden"* ['more order] and an *"espíritu anti-graffiti"* ['anti-graffiti spirit'], you could still knock on a door and the people are open to the possibility of having their outside walls painted.

To some extent then, this art street scene has provided an alternative to the modernising discourses of the Chilean success story, which might be more evident in Valparaíso than nowhere else in the country, even though the exact territory of their intervention is elusive (despite the evident tags of their gestures) and its relationship with the established art scene in the country remains unclear and fairly fluid. They do not necessarily maintain a direct oppositional relationship to the professionals (or the semi-professionals in this case), a position often taken by amateurs, and neither they could be easily framed in the narratives of the *"hobbyist"*, *"dilettante"* or *"pleasure-seeker," "leisure-class"*, and therefore confirm that the amateur has never had a single and steady identity, as argued by Anna Lee (2007). These non-professional artists might not be invested in institutional systems of knowledge production and policy construction, but the challenges that their practice poses should be framed in forms of art production that accepts dissonance, contradiction and the demands of the heterogeneous, speaking of the limitations in the roles of both the street artist and the and the established ones.

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