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Pragmatic Creative Interventions in Latin America

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Pragmatic Creative Interventions in Latin America

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
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by

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Abstract

In today's world, art and culture are becoming increasingly important in approaches to economic development. Although scholars of different academic disciplines have discussed the value of art in a variety of different fields, there is a lack of interdisciplinary work on the potential of art in areas of development. In this thesis, I aim to address this gap in the literature by analyzing projects that I classify as pragmatic creative interventions (PCIs). I define PCIs as projects that meet four different criteria: (1) they are collaborative; (2) they are localized; (3) they are forms of socially-engaged art; and (4) they are successful. My research begins with the construction of a theoretical framework that integrates a humanist approach to socially-engaged art with the recent concept of the creative economy, to argue for an interdisciplinary approach to development. I then present an original analysis of three different case studies from Latin America, which each demonstrate a different form of pragmatic creative intervention. The first case study addresses the *arpillera* movement in Chile; the second looks at the role of the Medellín International Poetry festival in the transformation of Medellín, Colombia. I conclude by examining the work of Mexican artist Raul Cárdenas Osuna and his creation of *ToroLab* in Tijuana, Mexico. I argue that these case studies represent manifestations of a pragmatic creative approach that a variety of actors can employ to produce economic, political, and social change. I conclude by addressing the issue of accountability within the study of these types of projects, as well as the implications of my research in areas outside of Latin America.

Chapter 1

A Theoretical Introduction

Doris Sommer, scholar, professor, and director of the Cultural Agents Initiative at Harvard, opens her foundational work on artistic social interventions by discussing the case of Bogotá, Colombia. In *The Work of Art in the World: Civic Agency and Public Humanities,* published in 2014, she writes, "Before Bogotá elected Mockus in 1994, it was the most dangerous city in Latin America, according to the U.S. State Department advisory not to go there" (Sommer, 15). The problems of extensive crime and violence were compounded by a high level of corruption, meaning that traditional public policy solutions, such as harsher penalties or increased public spending, were not going to work. Bogotanos were fleeing the city or staying indoors, too scared to send their children to school and too scared to be out on the streets themselves. The city needed something other than conventional political wisdom, and it came in the form of Antanas Mockus.

Mockus, a philosophy and mathematics professor and later a university president famous for his unconventional tactics, was elected mayor in 1994.[1] After searching for new solutions to seemingly insolvable problems, the mayor adopted an artistic approach that would allow citizens to reclaim the streets of their city. To decrease preventable traffic deaths, Mockus replaced corrupt traffic police with mime artists who interacted with drivers and pedestrians, using playful mocking to get them to follow the rules. This not only avoided the corruption problem, but also

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[1] Mockus rose to national stardom in 1993, when as president of the National University, he was attempting to give a speech to a feisty student audience. After trying a variety of strategies to get them to quiet down, he "turned around, dropped his pants, and mooned the crowd of noisy students," who were so shocked by the incident that they remained quiet for the duration of his speech. This incident later appeared on the nightly news, filmed by a student in the crowd, and made Mockus "famous for his former job and available for a new one." And so, in a perfect twist of fate, Mockus' unconventional actions freed him up to campaign as an unconventional mayor (Sommer, 26).

involved the entire city in acts of public performance, as residents went about their daily lives. This approach also changed the rules of the social game: Mockus had discovered that in Bogotá, people were more likely to obey the law when faced with the alternative of public shame, rather than with the threat of a fine.

The mime-replacement project that Mockus initiated was just one part of the mayor's broader creative approach to improving the city. To restore both public safety and civic involvement, the government promoted artistic projects aimed at increasing public safety and civic engagement in a variety of social spheres. Other examples included after-dark concerts in the parks, women's nights out, and city-wide contests for posters promoting the use of condoms. These interventions were unique not only in their creative approach, but also in their invitation to the public to get involved in reclaiming urban space as their own. Combined with more traditional measures such as limiting the sale of alcohol and imposing earlier closing hours for bars, these reforms allowed citizens to create safer, more inclusive public spaces, but also allowed them to become re-invested in its success. In turn, this widespread participation helped motivate more dialogue, which led to more projects and more investment, so that the effects multiplied far beyond their initial scope. Mockus' artistic agenda was inspired by his concept and platform of *cultura ciudadana*, ("civic culture"), which "combines pedagogy and persuasion to 'harmonize'" different norms of city life, and then inspires citizens to act in accordance with these collective codes of behavior (Sommer, 19). Sommer notes that these projects are often referred to as "cultural acupunctures" to emphasize the way that participatory public practices can be used to stimulate an entire city, providing a method of "collective healing" and "relief" (17).

With anecdotes such as these, it is easy to get lost in the creativity of the ideas and forget about the importance of results. If Mockus and other political leaders want public support, government policy must be evaluated based on statistical evidence, not on theories. Although Mockus' ideas and interventions were unique in their approach, their most important feature is that they were also unique in their success. In a city that seemed to be in a downward spiral, evidence provided tangible proof that life in Bogotá was improving thanks to Mockus' projects. As Sommer reports, homicides in Bogotá, which had been on the rise since 1983, dropped 67% from 1995, when Mockus began his first term, to 2003, when he left after his second. Traffic deaths decreased by 50%. Even more surprising is the evidence of public support for his programs: through a program called "Impuestos Voluntarios" (Voluntary Taxes), over 63,000 families chose to pay 10% more in taxes to fund specific public projects. This meant that Mockus not only had the creativity to improve the city, but the funding to do it. And so, while academics and the media may get caught up in the idea of the city as a large playground, classroom, or social experiment, the work that Mockus did also holds a practical lesson for politicians. As he writes, even in dangerous and chaotic situations, "People respond to humor and playfulness from politicians. It's the most powerful tool for change we have" (Mockus).

In the first chapter of her book, Sommer uses Antanas Mockus and his leadership in Bogotá as a way of introducing what she calls "top-down" interventions, in which politicians and other leaders can initiate collective art projects that benefit their constituents and improve city life. She emphasizes, however, that art can and should be involved in every sphere of civic life, and that creative projects can and should come from the top, the bottom, and anywhere in between. In subsequent chapters, Sommer examines different scenarios in which art has been used as an approach to social and political engagement. These real-world investigations serve to

illustrate a broader theoretical undercurrent, in which Sommer uses the work of German poet and thinker Friedrich Schiller to provide a scholarly justification for the importance of art in prosperous democratic societies. For my research, I use many of Sommer's concepts and definitions as a starting point for my own evaluation of artistic interventions throughout Latin America. I rely specifically on her ideas about what elements define democratic and socially motivated art, and I borrow much of her vocabulary in describing and analyzing my own case studies.

Sommer's main theoretical points concern her defense of art and aesthetics as valuable and essential parts of public life. Although her treatment of the importance of what she calls an "aesthetic education" goes beyond the scope of my own investigation, her discussion of the less-tangible effects of innovative art are useful in understanding many projects. Sommer describes Schiller's *The Aesthetic Education of Man* as the best defense for art-making throughout history, as she ties his argument for aesthetic development to the creation and motivation of civically-engaged students. My own analysis, although sometimes concerned with education, will focus more on the way that works of art and the people they involve can create concrete and sustainable change in a variety of societies and on a variety of issues. For this reason, I will refer less to Schiller and more to Sommer herself, who offers a technical and scholarly explanation of the types of artistic innovation that I examine. Although I will come back to her book throughout the thesis, it is useful to define a few concepts and themes that form the foundation of my argument.

Sommer writes that her book is inspired by "art projects that merit more sustained reflection than they have gotten." These projects, she says, are "creative works on grand and small scales that morph into institutional innovation" (3). Although I will develop a more

elaborate definition for these types of works later, Sommer's explanation is a useful way to conceptualize them for now. The key theme that she derives from these art projects is a justification for artistic education and what she calls "humanistic training", which she says is fundamental to creating active and engaged citizens. Throughout her book, she refers to the extensive ripple effects of art, which she says make all who acknowledge or engage with art "cultural agents", people who "lead social, culturally constructed lives" (3). I will address the concept of agents more formally when discussing Pedro Reyes' work in Mexico, but Sommer introduces the idea from both sides, acknowledging that both artists and those who experience it are part of "collective change" (4).

Sommer also emphasizes that although art does not have to be constructive, the world is in dire need of "constructive interventions", in the form of cultural projects or otherwise, and artistic approaches often yield some of the most innovative solutions to problems. It is this thread of thought that I will use throughout my analysis. The projects that Sommer discusses all start as works of art, and then "ripple into extra-artistic institutions and practices" (7). I relax this assumption, allowing projects to begin in a diverse variety of fields that may or may not be considered artistic. In this way, I expand the definition of art to be synonymous with creativity, so that art-making is not about the result but rather about the creative approach that is common across these types of works. As Sommer describes, these are "pragmatic projects (in law, medicine, crime prevention, economic development) that are fueled by the disruptive energy called art" (7). I will use this combination of pragmatism and disruptive energy as one of the defining elements of successful creative interventions.

Sommer's remaining chapters address different categories of constructive art, and examine different sides of the art-making process. I will return to her ideas throughout my own

work, specifically using her chapter on projects that come "from the top" (15) as well as her descriptions of socially engaged artists and the relationship between art and accountability. However, the importance of art in creative interventions must necessarily be discussed from both sides of the coin; that is, analysis must be done both from a humanist perspective as well as that of the social or economic intellectual, who is fundamentally concerned not with artistic education but with improving the lives of citizens in all parts of the world. To do this type of analysis, I turn to theories and research done by those most involved with the many diverse areas of social and economic development: statisticians, politicians, development experts, and economists.

Over a decade before Sommer published *The Work of Art in the World*, Richard Florida, a researcher, professor, and leader in the field of urban studies, published *The Rise of the Creative Class*. Florida's book defined a new class of workers that were valued for their innovative capabilities, that is, their ability to do things in a way that had never been done before. He writes that people in this field, "engage in complex problem solving," and "share a common ethos that values creativity, individuality, difference, and merit," (9) a definition reminiscent of the "cultural agents" discussed by Sommer. Florida introduced American economists, academics, businesses and workers to a new way of thinking about the future of economic development. Florida was primarily concerned with post-industrial nations and the cities within them, whose future growth would lie in the emergence and cultivation of a creative class of workers. Much of Florida's work was later rejected by other scholars, mostly because of a lack of empirical evidence and little evidence that the creative class could be beneficial across income groups.[2]

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[2] The United Nations Report on the Creative Economy, which I introduce below, explains that after the initial positive response to the concepts presented in *The Rise of the Creative Class*, the theory of the "creative class" has been largely discredited. Scholars and experts began to question not only Florida's recommendations but also the data itself, and it became clear that his strategy provided little or no benefit to low-income populations. For a recent discussion of the evolution of creative class theory, Florida's own 2014 article entitled "The Creative Class and Economic Development" traces the origins of the idea as well as the controversies surrounding his work.

However, his ideas inspired further research and investigation into what creative development could do for cities all over the world.

Around the same time as Florida, British writer John Howkins introduced the idea of a creative economy, and emphasized the wide potential for profits and growth in fields that rely on innovation, from music to science research and development. Gradually, theories began to emerge about what this economy, and the encompassed "creative industries" might look like. In 2008, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) released its first *Creative Economy Report,* which aimed to define and quantify the creative economy on a global scale, as well as evaluate its potential contributions to sustainable development. A second report followed in 2010, and in 2013, UNDP, in conjunction with UNESCO, published the *United Nations Creative Economy Report 2013 Special Edition*, with the byline "Widening local development pathways."[3] The United Nations and the UNDP are arguably one of the foremost authorities on international development and policy, and this report formalized the relationship between creative innovation and economic development. It is this report that I will use to form an analytical framework that examines creative interventions from the perspective of economic, social, and political development, to provide a practical argument for the presence of art in all of these spheres.

From the outset, the UN Creative Economy Report acknowledges that the purpose of the report is to address the "urgent need to find new development pathways that encourage creativity and innovation in the pursuit of inclusive, equitable, and sustainable growth and development" (2). The report begins by defining the evolution of the creative economy and its general features,
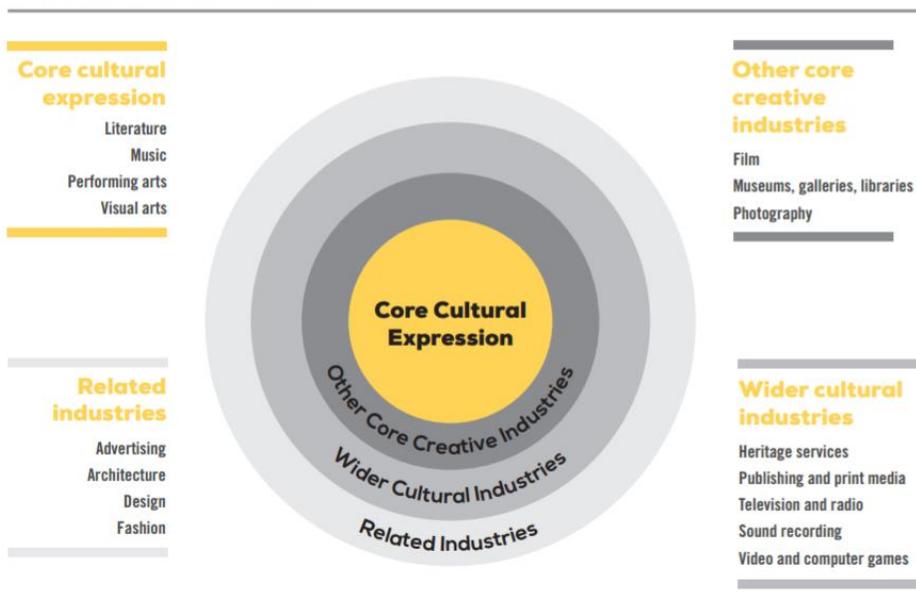
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[3] From here on, I will refer to the 2013 report as the UN Report or the UN Creative Economy Report

and then goes on to discuss the importance of cities and local-level development, the non-economic benefits of the creative economy, and the practical strategies for promoting the creative economy in the developing world. Like Sommer's work, the report also reviews a variety of projects and policies from around the globe, as examples of different aspects and adaptions of the creative economy, used to address specific local issues. The report evaluates these projects and local endeavors primarily by their contribution to local economic and social development. In this vein, the language of the report focuses more on culture and cultural productions than art, preferring to use the term "creative" to denote a wide variety of products, approaches, and activities. Several of these projects take place in Latin America, serving as brief case studies that illustrate some of the many potential forms that these initiatives can take. The examples cited in the report often appear business-oriented on the surface, but a closer look reveals that they are all fundamentally rooted in local cultural and artistic practices. Argentina in particular has seen a recent increase in creative responses to a variety of problems. According to the report, cultural and creative industries account for 3.5% of GDP and 300,000 jobs across the nation. Because I do not address Argentina in any of my subsequent case studies, I will use examples from this country to illustrate the concepts I define throughout this section.

The UN report states that the creative economy is a way of thinking, as well as a sector composed of a variety of creative industries, which are defined as a broad "productive set, including goods and services produced by the cultural industries and those that depend on innovation, including many types of research and software development" (20). The concept of cultural industries refers to a narrower group of industries, which include "forms of cultural production and consumption that have at their core a symbolic or expressive element" (20). The report discusses a variety of classification systems for both creative and cultural systems, which

have been used by experts in different sectors. The newness of the creative economy as a concept, as well as its inherent interdisciplinary qualities, have made it difficult to coherently define and quantify. As the report states, "Communities often challenge and seek to reshape prevailing models to suit the reality of their local context, culture and markets… terms are therefore constantly evolving as new dialogues develop, and led to question, for example, whether and where to classify fashion shows, carnivals and video games in the cultural and creative industry models" (21). However, the report argues, this does not diminish the sector's importance or the need to evaluate it, and to this end the report's authors summarize a variety of models that have been developed to help understand the creative industries. One well-known model, developed by David Throsby, is shown below (23).

Figure 1.2 Modelling the Cultural and Creative Industries: Concentric Circles Model[6]

Core cultural expression
Literature
Music
Performing arts
Visual arts

Other core creative industries
Film
Museums, galleries, libraries
Photography

Related industries
Advertising
Architecture
Design
Fashion

Wider cultural industries
Heritage services
Publishing and print media
Television and radio
Sound recording
Video and computer games

Core Cultural Expression
Other Core Creative Industries
Wider Cultural Industries
Related Industries

In Argentina, the government has chosen to focus on supporting certain creative industries that it deems most important for the country's success in the global market. Through

an initiative known as the *Argentinian Cultural Industries Market (MICA)*, a variety of government organizations have come together to "generate business, promote information exchange and networking across Argentine regions, and showcase the quality, competitiveness and diversity of national cultural industries" (78). The project was created in 2011, and focuses specifically on Argentina's performing arts, design, and entertainment sectors, among others. The market is a collaboration between the National Secretariat of Culture and Ministries ranging from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Ministry of Employment and Social Security. It aims to provide an opportunity for businesses to network, share ideas, and locate resources that will enable them to become more competitive in international markets. The program acknowledges and encourages the centrality of culture in a variety of Argentinian industries, and works to help creative companies use their unique strengths to gain an edge in their respective fields.

As with Sommer's work, I will reference the UN Creative Economy report throughout my thesis as it relates to different case studies and concepts, but there are a few broad themes that provide a foundation for my entire study. The first is the report's emphasis on the importance of culture and creativity for sustainable economic development. The report argues that although both terms are hard to define and broadly used, they agree with the argument that "cultural and creative industries not only drive growth through the creation of value, but have also become key elements of the *innovation system of the entire economy*" (21).[4] Regardless of the specific model, one of the fundamental assumptions of macroeconomics is that sustainable long-term growth is fueled by technological improvements, or, less specifically, innovation.

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[4] Emphasis is the authors'.

Therefore, the fact that creative industries are drivers of innovation means that they can also be drivers of sustainable economic growth, which is a prerequisite for any type of development.

The report also underscores the importance of tailoring development projects to local conditions, and notes that cultural and creative industries are necessarily local phenomena. Because cultural contexts are place and community-based, the projects and products they create are grounded in local issues and details. For this reason, policy prescriptions regarding the creative economy are aimed at creating the right environment for innovation, and encouraging research and adaptation of different techniques to fit the local landscape. In this light, the creative economy can be thought of both as a description of a sector as well as a way of thinking about and finding solutions for development. Another key idea that I will use in my analysis is the classification of the creative economy as a hybrid sector in almost all senses of the word: it spans both the private, public, and not-for-profit sectors, as well as its reliance on both formal and informal cultural systems (26).

In Argentina's creative industries, it is easy to see these concepts at work. In La Plata, the job opportunities in creative industries are often unavailable to low-income youth due to the high cost of required schooling. To solve this problem, an NGO that works to promote the performing arts worked with the Argentine Theatre and the Cultural Institute of Buenos Aires to establish a vocational school for the unemployed. With funding from the UNESCO International Fund for Cultural Diversity, the school provides low-cost training in theatre and production techniques for youth and adults. The collaborative nature of the project has been fundamental to its success: a placement program helps connect students with jobs and internships upon completion of their studies, or helps them start their own business. Students even participate in the sustainability of the school: students can sell their art through a network created by the various organizations, and

proceeds go to the artists as well as to the school (34). Another similar project is Productive Identities, which works in thirteen provinces around Argentina to increase creative opportunities among vulnerable populations. The program is jointly funded by the National Secretariat of Culture, provincial governments, and the private sector, and provides training in "the production of technologies, materials, and local symbols that can then be embedded into handicrafts" (78). This culturally embedded program serves multiple artistic and practical functions, building social and economic opportunities for the local community as it "opens up access to new marketplaces" and "promotes collective workflows that leverage bargaining power" (78).

The idea of a creative economy is extremely fluid, and highly dependent on the context in which it is being used. Therefore, a formal definition of the concept is difficult to find. It is generally understood that the term 'creative economy' encompasses a broader set of processes and interactions than 'creative industries'. Quoted by creative industry scholar John Newbigin, writer Robert Hewison explains that the creative economy is "'the configuration of relationships that gives a system its essential characteristics. Thus, it is less helpful to define the creative economy by what it does, than try to understand how it is organized.'" Newbigin proceeds to explain that this understanding challenges our categorization of what is classified as 'creative', forcing us to consider that the growth of creative activity in all sectors may be "a harbinger of a whole new economic order, providing a new paradigm for the way in which businesses are organized, education is understood and provided, value is measured, the working lives and career prospects of millions of people are likely to develop and how the cities they live in will be planned and built" (Newbigin). Recognizing the difficulty of defining these new ideas, I adopt the pragmatic perspective of the UN report, which acknowledges the limits of the creative economy and reminds readers that these new industries by themselves cannot solve poverty,

correct inequality, or reform unjust societies (30). Rather, the creative economy should be viewed as one component of the change process. The argument that the report develops, and that I will defend through my own research, is that "human ingenuity and creativity are the primary resources that drive the creative economy and transformative change process" (32).

In this study, I will use both Sommer and the UN Creative Economy Report to analyze the multifaceted features of art projects that address public issues and play a key role in various forms of community development. Although the writers of the UN report and Sommer come from different backgrounds and fields of study, they both recognize the importance of innovation, the wide scope of these types of projects, and the need for artistic and cultural forms when working towards sustainable development. At times the vocabulary is different: Sommer tends towards a humanist's use of "art" and "aesthetic education", while the UN report tends to make use of "creativity" and discusses implications for inequality, poverty, and safety. Sommer generally refers to the scenarios she studies as projects or works whereas the report refers to "different kinds of creative economy development," (54). I will argue that these differences in terminology and concepts are no more than differences in form, which follow naturally from examining the same phenomena from two different perspectives.

From a theoretical standpoint, one of the main themes I will develop is that Sommer, the United Nations, and other economists, academics, and urban theorists are all explaining and promoting different facets of a concept that is fundamentally multifaceted; creativity, art and innovation are all, at the core, individualized and unique processes. Therefore, their application to social, political, and economic issues will always be varied and hard to generalize. The goal shared by theorists and experts, and the goal I adopt for my work, is to identify what might be called the salient characteristics of successful creative interventions, and to develop an approach

that can be applied in any variety of scenarios. For this reason, it is useful to explain some of the general features of the case studies that follow, as well as present a system of classification that can be used to think about the different projects.

Given the variety of terminology that can be applied to the works that I will examine, I will first define the concepts that provide the framework for my research specifically. Each case study I present will discuss a specific country, or city within a country, and will focus on a specific project that demonstrates a creative approach to solving a specific local issue. I call these projects pragmatic creative interventions (PCIs), to emphasize that while they incorporate a cultural or artistic approach, their fundamental purpose is to provide a practical, useful solution to specific community issue. There are four main characteristics of pragmatic creative interventions. These include: (1) they are collaborative, in the sense that they involve actors from any level of society and facilitate participation by the entire community; (2) they are localized, meaning that they are rooted in the unique cultural, political, and economic characteristics of the place in which they occur, and address a specific local issue; (3) they are forms of socially-engaged art, meaning that they rely on a creative approach while simultaneously holding themselves accountable to a larger public; and (4) they are successful, as measured both by available evidence as well as by their support from the local community. Although there are other characteristics that are common, such as the predominance of these initiatives in urban settings, these features are not necessary for success, at least in the case studies that follow.

The initiatives that I examine are also linked by a common geographical factor: they all take place in Spanish-speaking, Latin American countries. This regional restriction is in part a practical one, as it was necessary to narrow the sample size of my research, but it is also a particularly useful region for examining the relationship between art and development. The

region shares certain features that make it easier to compare across national borders: most countries can be classified as developing economies, most share a history of Spanish colonialism interacting with indigenous populations, and all share a linguistic tie. Additionally, cultural intermediation and adaptation as a society have meant that throughout history, Latin American countries traditionally place high value on culture, art and creativity.[5] For these reasons, Latin America is particularly well suited to cultivating a wide variety of artistic initiatives, many of which serve as important examples of pragmatic creative interventions.

The three case studies that follow examine different problematic scenarios and creative solutions in Chile, Colombia, and Mexico. In each chapter, I provide a general overview of national and local issues, introduce any relevant theoretical concepts, and then go on to investigate a certain pragmatic creative initiative and its effects. Each project represents a different approach, and the studies are classified based on the answers to these three questions: (1) Who is initiating the project?; (2) What sphere of development or public issue are they addressing?; and (3) How is art being repurposed to offer a creative solution to the problem? I begin by examining the Chilean *arpillera* movement that emerged in the 1940s as a response to the Pinochet dictatorship, which offers an example of a bottom-up intervention that emerged as a collaboration between organizations and disenfranchised citizens. I then turn to the transformation of the city of Medellín, Colombia starting in the 1990s, in order to analyze government policies of social urbanism and the contribution of the Medellín International Poetry Festival in reshaping cultural and physical space. Finally, I address a variety of Mexican artists who are realigning their craft with broader social and economic issues, primarily using Raul

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[5] Cultural intermediation refers to the ways in which Latin American countries have historically had to reconcile two conflicting cultural, social, and economic histories: on the one hand, that of the indigenous peoples that originally populated the region, and, on the other, that of the Spanish and Portuguese colonizers who would come to rule the area.

Cárdenas Osuna to incorporate theories of artistic activism and the role of individuals in initiating PCIs.

These case studies will serve not as models to be applied indiscriminately, but rather as examples of the different methods and uses of art projects as solutions to local issues. The purpose of this thesis is to synthesize economic, artistic, cultural, social, and political theories that have been presented regarding creativity and development, and through the three case studies, perform an interdisciplinary analysis of what has been achieved in the field.

Chapter 2

Economics and Politics in the Chilean *Arpillera* Movement

On September 11th, 1973, Augusto Pinochet lead a military coup that overthrew Chile's democratically elected socialist president, Salvador Allende. Pinochet would rule as dictator for the next seventeen years, and Chileans remember September 11th as the beginning of the darkest period in the country's history. In the weeks and months that followed, as acclaimed Chilean author Isabel Allende writes, "Censorship, curfew, exile, prison, torture, and *desaparecidos*—people taken by the police and never seen again—became a way of life for many Chileans" (Agosín, xi). Pinochet and the Chilean military targeted socialist party members, trade unionists, writers, artists, academics, and anyone else suspected of being a leftist sympathizer or a threat to the regime. Men disappeared overnight and their families were torn apart, facing poverty and starvation with increasingly scarce resources. Women were encouraged to maintain their traditional roles, to care for their families, and to stay away from politics.

As husbands, fathers, and sons disappeared, their wives, daughters, and mothers were left behind, without a source of income and often with a family to care for. These women had no one to turn to for answers, and no way of discovering what had happened to their loved ones. Inquiry with the government was almost guaranteed to fail, and the climate of fear was so pervasive that people avoided public conversations and spaces, much less gathered to exchange information or discuss the situation. These women found themselves without benefits, income, or anyone to speak for them, and they were completely excluded from traditional political arenas. This political exclusion was not, however, entirely a result of the dictatorship.

From the beginning of Chile's democratization in 1932, women were considered second-class citizens in many ways. In her book, *Women and Politics in Chile*, political science

professor Susan Franceschet writes that women in Chile traditionally experienced a "gendered" citizenship, in which their civil, social, and political citizenship was largely restricted due to their gender. She identifies a variety of causes of this inequality, noting that politics in the forty years prior to the dictatorship were focused on differences of class, leaving women mostly out of the equation. Men were the primary beneficiaries of social reforms and new welfare programs, while women rarely received any direct aid from the government (Franceschet, 23-26).

Pinochet's government sought to reemphasize women's traditional roles as mothers and moral figures, leaving them completely outside of the political realm. The regime preached obedience and complete submission to authority, and, for them, traditional women were the perfect embodiment of these values. Franceschet writes that "women were depicted as models of apolitical passivity, one of the highest virtues in the national project of reconstruction" (60). The government established a National Women's Secretariat to implement programs specifically for women, many of which were run by female volunteers of the upper classes, who were often wives of military officers. The organization's goal was to promote the government's vision of the ideal woman, one who conformed to the traditional role of an apolitical, modest, virtuous mother. This rhetoric, however, was hard to reconcile with the fact that many women now had to serve as a secondary, if not primary, breadwinner for their household. As men disappeared at the hands of the regime, or lost their jobs due to increasing unemployment, women often had to enter the formal job sector in order to provide for their families.

Looking for a way to aid the women of Chile and to promote a return to democracy, groups such as the Chilean Committee for Peace and the Vicaría de la Solidaridad (Vicariate of Solidarity) began organizing workshops where women could gather to create crafts. These crafts could then be sold internationally to earn money and raise international awareness about the

dictatorship. It was at these gatherings that the *arpillera* art form was born. Although it is unclear

exactly where *arpilleras* originated, we know that they are a handicraft unique to the Chilean

people. According to some sources, the *arpillera* piece is based on a technique for burlap

embroidery that was used by the famous Chilean folksinger Violeta Parra in her wall tapestries.

It is said that the wives of fishermen at Isla Negra, where Pablo Neruda had a home, were also

known for their creation of burlap pieces. These women embroidered wool onto fabric to create

tapestries, whereas the *arpilleristas* of the 1970s used an applique technique that involved

sewing scraps of old cloth onto burlap pieces (Brodsky, 112-113). The *Museo de la Memoria,*

Santiago, Chile's Museum of Memory, explains that the applique method was chosen for the

arpilleras due to its simpler nature, but both techniques are considered "ancient and universal"

art forms (Brodsky, 113).[6] In her research on *arpilleras,* sociologist Jacqueline Adams describes

the objects as "applique pictures in cloth, measuring approximately twenty-three by seventeen

inches, usually depicting the hunger, lack of jobs, and political repression in the shantytowns,"

towns impoverished communities located mostly around the capital of Santiago (Adams, 316).

Arpilleras were architecturally simple, but their vibrant colors and politically-charged scenes

made them powerful instruments of communication.

    After the *arpilleras* were completed, organizations such as the Vicaría would smuggle

them out of the country to be sold internationally. Sales were orchestrated by Chilean exiles

living abroad or by human rights organizations working to spread awareness about the

dictatorship. Citizens of other countries could then voice their support for the Chilean people by

buying these pieces (Adams, 318). The *arpillera* workshops also provided an opportunity for

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[6] The term *arpillera* itself can be applied to either of the two techniques, referring not to the method of creation but rather to the "coarse fabric" upon which the pieces were constructed (Brodsky, 113).

women to discuss what was happening to them and their families, and strategies for surviving and resisting government control. Members of the Vicaría would provide the women basic economic and political education that many had never received. During these meetings, which mainly occurred in local church buildings, women began to acquire a sense of political awareness that they had previously been denied. The production and sale of *arpilleras* involved many institutions and individuals both domestically and internationally, and meant that the women involved became entwined in a widespread political and social network resisting the power of the Pinochet regime.

Thus far, the *arpillera* movement has received notable but not overwhelming attention from the academic community. In 1982, with Pinochet still in power, a magazine called *Literatura Chilena, creación y crítica* published an article by Eliana Moya-Raggio on the Chilean *arpilleras*. Two years later, the article was revised and re-published in English in *Feminist Studies*, an American academic journal dedicated to women's studies. In it, Moya-Raggio clearly and succinctly describes the Chilean *arpillera* movement, contextualizing it within a broader culture of resistance, but also emphasizing its uniqueness as an artistic and political form. The article is only five pages long, and lacks theoretical underpinning as well as traditional academic analyses, but it clearly and succinctly relates each distinct element of the movement. Perhaps because of the immediacy of the subject matter, and its position as one of the first literary works on the *arpilleras*, the importance of the movement comes across almost poetically. Moya-Raggio's piece has been frequently cited, and certainly contributed to public knowledge about *arpilleras*. However, it was not until 3 years later that the *arpillera* movement was addressed by the woman who would become their most famous proponent.

Chilean author and scholar Marjorie Agosín wrote her first article on *arpilleras* in 1987.

In 1996, she published the pioneering work *Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love*, which tells the

complete story of the *arpilleristas* and their craft.[7] Her work is "a tale of magical threads created

by a group of Chilean women who defied the military dictatorship by embroidering their sorrow

on scraps of cloth and elaborating from their handiwork one of the boldest means of popular

protest in Latin America" (Agosín, 38). Her book seeks to introduce the world to an art form that

had gone largely unrecognized in studies of the Pinochet dictatorship. Agosín writes to inform

her audience of the incredible feat these women achieved, which, she emphasizes, was no less

than the creation of a completely unique and incredibly powerful form of popular protest.

Tapestries of Hope describes the development of the *arpillera* movement over the seventeen

years of the dictatorship through Chile's transition back to democracy in the early 1990s.[8]

Agosín's personalized account and her focus on individual testimonies highlights the

voices of the women, adding to the memories and stories that they fought to preserve when they

originally created the *arpilleras*. In her analysis of the *arpilleras* and the workshops in which

they were produced, she focuses on the works as symbols of hope and tools of narration in a time

of repression. Agosín writes that these pieces "represented the only dissident voices in a society

obliged to silence," and above all are "stories of loss, denial of a future, lives robbed of

happiness, grandchildren, and family love" (45). She emphasizes the importance of *arpilleras* as

storytelling instruments and as objects of preservation, whether that be the preservation of

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[7] A revised and expanded second edition was published in 2008, and it is this edition that I reference throughout the chapter.

[8] The first part of the book traces the historical conditions that led to the emergence of the *arpillera* workshops, and describes the evolution of the art form, as well as the political, economic, and social implications of the movement both during and after the dictatorship. The second and third parts of the book consist of a collection of testimonies from the *arpilleristas* themselves. The second part covering testimonies between 1974 and 1994, under Pinochet and during the democratic transition. The third part, published in the 2008 edition, covers testimonies recorded between 2005 and 2006, providing a more recent perspective.

individual stories of love and loss, collective memories of suffering, or of national culture struggling to survive in the face of the dictatorship. Agosín's work is filled with stories of her own connections to the *arpilleristas* and to her homeland of Chile, charging the book with personal undertones and adding to the testimonial quality of the text. [9]

Using a vocabulary of magic and religion, Agosín creates a tone of wonder at the accomplishments of these women, which further underscores her point that this movement represents one of Latin America's most unique and powerful forms of popular resistance. She writes of "magical threads" (38) and "threads of hope" (45), of hands that "became luminous as they sewed a large sun" (56), and of "a craft of love" (74). Her work is a vital and touching introduction to the world of the *arpilleristas*, and it tells a poignant story about the *arpillera* movement as an example of the ability of marginalized citizens to create subversive art in the most desperate of scenarios. What Agosín's book lacks, however, is a thorough analysis of the political and economic opportunities that the *arpillera* movement offered to the women who made them, as well as an examination of the role of other groups and the international community in the promotion of the tapestries and the protection of the women who made them.

The *arpillera* movement has been addressed by many other scholars in a variety of disciplines. Sociologist Jacqueline Adams, previously a research associate at the University of California Berkeley, has studied the women of the *arpillera* movement and recently published a book about the many facets of the *arpillera* process, from production to sale abroad. Her work focuses on *arpilleras* as objects that were shaped by the many actors involved in their production, but that would also, in turn, reshape the political and cultural environments from

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[9] Agosín, who now teaches at Wellesley college, was one of many Chileans who had to flee the country under Pinochet's rule.

which they emerged. Experts in the fields of textiles and tapestries have also performed extensive analyses of the form and function of the *arpilleras*. Dayna L. Caldwell wrote a 2012 piece for the Textile Society of America entitled "The Chilean *Arpilleristas*: Changing National Politics Through Tapestry Work," and various curators have written their own interpretations of pieces within exhibitions and individual collections. There are also articles from scholars of art and art history, politics and social movements, and occupational therapy.[10]

My analysis of the *arpillera* movement combines theoretical elements of many of the works above, but it will center on the importance of the movement as an early example of a pragmatic creative intervention. I argue that *arpilleras* were sustainable art forms precisely because they provided economic opportunity as well as a political outlet, without which they would not have been successful. The tendency of academic literature to emphasize the preservation of memory as the purpose of the *arpillera* movement obscures their political and economic importance, and downplays the ways in which these women were not only surviving the dictatorship but actively working to dismantle it. This focus also fails to recognize the political significance of this movement, which, along with other women's movements of the time, contributed to the advancement of women's rights both during and after the dictatorship. *Arpillera* workshops helped create a sense of solidarity among Chilean women, and provided a forum for understanding and critiquing political and economic systems. The fact that the *arpillera* movement was a women's movement was not a random occurrence but rather an intentional decision with important consequences for women's place in Chilean society. I assert that in addition to being a method of coping or of preserving memory, the *arpillera* movement

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[10] Susan Traini, from the University of Western Ontario's School of Occupational Therapy, wrote a short article entitled "Unforgotten to the unforgettable: How Arpilleras contributed to Chilean history informing everyday occupations and social change."

was an example of a pragmatic creative intervention that produced change from the bottom up. Therefore, it must be understood in terms of its economic and political causes and effects.

Throughout Chile and Latin America, art has a history of being closely tied to social movements, and has been highly present in approaches to popular resistance, especially among marginalized groups. Dutch scholar Eve Kalyva writes that art has always been "one of society's fundamental transformative forces" in the region, in the sense that it is an essential element of democracy-building and working towards social equality (46). Doris Sommer writes of the unique "disarming technique" employed by art, allowing it to work from the bottom up to alter social and political realities (Sommer, 89). Using other theorists' work as well as my own reading of specific *arpilleras*, I assert that the diverse array of participants, as well as the highly adaptive quality of the *arpillera* movement gave economic, political, and social power to the women who involved, allowing to play an important role in bringing an end to the dictatorship. Further, I will argue that the contribution of the *arpilleristas* has not received adequate attention in discussions of the dictatorship, in academic settings as well as in spaces of memory such as Santiago's Museo de la Memoria (Museum of Memory). The contributions made by the *arpillera* movement, both towards dismantling the Pinochet regime, and empowering women and their families, demonstrate the power of art as a tool for uniting organizations and individuals to fight oppressive governments from the grassroots.

In the second chapter of *The Work of Art in the World*, Doris Sommer focuses on what she calls "trickle-up innovation," art projects which start small but encourage critical thinking and challenge established social, political, and economic norms (52). She describes the way in which individual artworks can lead to reflection on the issues that inspired the work, even for audiences who have little personal experience with those issues. It is this phenomenon that made

the *arpilleras* effective on an international level: as works of art they benefitted from being both aesthetic objects and transmitters of information about a specific place and problem. This dual purpose of the art inspired sympathy and economic and political solidarity on an international scale. Sommer also addresses the effects of collective art-making on the creators themselves, explaining how the production of physical art forms encourages innovative thinking and new ways of addressing collective social challenges. She writes that the construction of works of art "wrests some creative control over material and social constraints that might otherwise seem paralyzing." "Artists," she says, "are never simply victims of circumstance," (50-51). The process of making *arpilleras* allowed women to achieve creative control in the face of a seemingly hopeless situation.

In "The Rhetoric of Disobedience: Art and Power in Latin America", Eve Kalyva examines the role of art in the democratization of Latin American societies, starting in the 1970s and continuing through the present day. Kalyva looks at art as "an activity that reflects upon the world and seeks to change it," as well as one that simultaneously "critically reflects upon its own condition and relation to that world" (46). Art's capacity for engagement and self-reflection are what make it a powerful tool for promoting critical thinking and institutional change, especially in terms of identifying and subverting oppressive power dynamics in the political realm. Kalyva uses specific examples of art projects from Argentina and Chile to argue that art is not only a product of sociopolitical systems, but also a force that shapes them. She focuses specifically on the rhetoric of art, using the term rhetoric "in the sense of identifying how artistic practices generate and displace meaning across artistic, sociopolitical, and discursive practices" (47). The author goes on to examine creative interdisciplinary projects that mix art and politics in order to

subvert traditional power hierarchies by providing alternatives to the "official discourse" those

hierarchies employ (47).

In Chile, Kalyva analyzes initiatives started by the Chilean Colectivo de Acciones de

Arte (CADA), an artistic group that was active under the Pinochet dictatorship from 1979-

1985.[11] She describes CADA as a "example of artistic practice that engages social reality and

seeks to reconfigure art's position in society," (54). CADA's art projects were collaborative

efforts to bring art into new public spaces, creating new forms of dialogue and encouraging

creativity among citizens. One of their first projects, for example, involved turning the

distribution of bags of milk into a creative act, by labeling the bags to refer to Salvador Allende's

'half-liter of milk' campaign; and by publishing accompanying texts that encouraged readers to

think of drinking milk as a metaphor for the daily consumption of information that could then be

used creatively.[12] Later in the project, empty milk bags were distributed to philosophers and

artists to be transformed into artworks. Further texts used poetic devices to reframe individual

suffering as a collective experience, and to call for creative and collaborative social change. The

texts and material works that CADA produced played an important role in changing public

perceptions about art. They brought public attention to the place of art in everyday life, and

encouraged disheartened citizens to think creatively about their role as creative actors.

Using Kalyva's definition of art as a "transformative social praxis," (46) I will argue that

the creation of *arpilleras* performed a similar, although non-textual, rhetorical function. The

arpilleras provided an alternative discourse that was used to gain political power under the

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[11] CADA was started by a group of various types of artists, and included a writer, a poet, a sociologist, and a visual artist.

[12] This slogan referred to ex-president Salvador Allende's promise to secure a half-liter of milk for every child in Chile, an initiative meant to address the issue of widespread hunger in the country's impoverished communities (Kalyva, 55).

constraints of the dictatorship. Like the projects Kalyva examines, *arpilleras* were able to

"reinsert art in social life," providing a way for disenfranchised women to "reformulate cultural

production as a political activity aiming to transform both the activity's own premises and their

wider context" (64). However, I will argue that the production and sale of *arpilleras* went

beyond the projects Kalyva describes, because they not only encouraged creative production

through rhetoric, but also constituted a form of creative production that women could use to

improve their economic and political status. Whereas projects such as CADA might use texts and

symbolism to "furnish the impoverished collective imagination with a new language," (58), the

arpillera movement directly addressed the concrete issues of poverty and political oppression.

This is not to say that both projects weren't meaningful, but rather to suggest that truly impactful

art works must provide more than rhetoric; they must offer practical and sustainable solutions to

immediate issues.

The multiple influences and collaborative nature of the *arpillera* movement are best observed through an analysis of the works themselves. For comparison purposes, the *arpilleras* can be split into two groups. The first group of pieces were constructed during the early years of the dictatorship, and tended to be more radical, meaning that they were more frequently censored by the government. The second group of pieces were produced later in the dictatorship and depicted less provocative scenes. It was during this stage that the movement became more focused on the production of tapestries for sale around the world. The first, denunciatory stage of *arpillera* production was known as the "'building support stage'" (Brodsky, 114). During these years, many *arpilleras* explicitly depicted human rights abuses and oppressive acts by the government. For example, the image above shows one particularly striking tapestry from Marjorie Agosín's collection displays four graphic depictions of torture. Ignoring the traditional practice of using bright colors and many fabrics, the *arpillera* contains four scenes of white figures against a black background, some hanging from a bar, others restrained inside a cage, and two others tied to a wire bed frame and a chair. Although it is an incredibly jarring portrayal, Agosín notes that this theme, unlike many others in the *arpilleras*, was never repeated. She writes that this was "due to the grave seriousness of the crime as well as the way in which it affected the life of the *arpilleristas*," (Agosín, image 7).

This kind of violent imagery was deemed too inflammatory and too likely to invite government censorship. As sociologist Jaqueline Adams notes, "A hostile local political environment […] can cause the intermediary to order only mildly subversive artworks," (Adams, 333). In "The Makings of Political Art", Adams goes on to explain how employees of the Vicaría, worried about tapestries being confiscated by government officials, would ask the women to "tone down" the content of the *arpilleras* (333). In other words, women could not

simply create tapestries displaying whatever they wanted, but rather were creating pieces that had to act in accordance with a broader strategy. Adams' central point is that political art is molded by a variety of interacting forces, and that the *arpilleras* in particular were influenced by groups such as the Vicaría and by the attitudes of the international community. She writes that in addition to socializing the women and creating engaged citizens, another main goal of the Vicaría was "bringing about the return of democracy," by creating "international indignation, so that a community of solidary people would apply political pressure from abroad," (326). This meant finding a sort of intermediary path, where the tapestries would portray some of the restrictions and hardships of the dictatorship, but not so much as to cause regular censorship if they were caught. Therefore, many of the *arpilleras* focused on certain standard themes.

Although it is hard to characterize *arpilleras* due to the diversity of the pieces, most share certain common elements. The typical *arpillera* is extremely vibrant, using a variety of bright colors and patterns. The scenes often use three-dimensional visuals, and include people, generally small, triangular figures in bright clothing. They are often set in the shantytowns that surrounded Santiago during the dictatorship, and show the day-to-day struggle of the people who lived there. Common images were of soup kitchens, raids, protests, or people searching for work. Drawing on her extensive interviews with *arpilleristas*, Jacqueline Adams writes that there were booklets handed out by the Vicaría with "rules" of the *arpillera*, ensuring some basic similarities. One rule, for example, was that *arpilleras* could only depict things that the women had experienced, and that were true to real life. She also notes, however, that the Vicaría office would sometimes request depictions of specific scenes, say of a raid or a protest. Although the guidelines were enforced differently depending on the workshop, all *arpilleras* were made with the goal of communicating a message. The bright colors and visual appeal of the pieces can

contrast with the somber themes of the tapestries, but *arpilleras* were not merely pretty pictures; they were works that were designed to express ideas.

The *arpillera* shown above is a typical scene depicting an everyday issue. Water quality in the shantytowns of Santiago was often poor, and water was sometimes cut off altogether. The phrase "corte de agua" refers to these water cuts, and the figures can be seen with their empty water buckets. Many of the central elements of an *arpillera* can be seen in the image: the bright colors, the presence of human figures, and the depiction of a real, experienced event. The presence of the Andes mountains in the background is also a common element, and it both situates the *arpilleras* geographically as well as invokes a sense of the city of Santiago. For the purposes of international sale, this element allowed viewers to associate the images with a specific time and place, and remind them of the cause they were aiding. *Arpilleras* often contained short, stitched phrases such as the one above. These could describe the scenario in the picture, or might be simple phrases of protest: themes such as justice and peace were common, as were questions such as "where are the disappeared?" or statements declaring a woman's

opposition to certain policies. It is this type of *arpillera* that became more and more standard as

the dictatorship progressed. Many of the extreme human rights abuses occurred in the first few

years of Pinochet's regime, and as the dictatorship stretched on, daily suffering was increasingly

due to the lack of basic necessities, including water, food, shelter, and access to health and

education. The *arpilleras*, then, were ways of communicating these necessities to the outside

world, keeping the image of Chilean suffering present in the eyes of international supporters. The

continuing stream of *arpilleras* helped inspire continuous solidarity from people of other

countries, whose governments could then put pressure on the Pinochet government.

As the *arpillera* movement developed and spread, restoring democracy was no longer its

only goal. Increasingly, *arpillera* workshops became about educating and socializing women so

that they could become more politically active, even if only in the informal political sphere. As a

traditionally marginalized group in Chilean society, women previously spent most of their time

in the home. As the piece above shows, the *arpillera* movement gave them an opportunity to

organize both socially and politically. Marjorie Agosín writes that this tapestry was most likely

produced in 1975, in the early years of the dictatorship, but already captured the idea of the

workshop as a place for community gathering (Agosín, image 3). It shows the women interacting

as they sew, and the stained-glass windows invoke the churches in which workshops often took

place. In each workshop, the *arpilleristas* were not only creating fabric works, but were

receiving education about the political situation in Chile, discussing current events and learning

about democratic values. The importance of the *arpillera* movement for the immediate lives of

these women was two-fold: it gave them a way to earn an income, providing economic

empowerment, but it also went further and gave them a way to organize and educate themselves,

increasingly providing a route to political empowerment. As the political scientist Susan

Franceschet writes, the irony of the dictatorship was that by completely closing off the formal

political sphere, the informal political sphere became more accessible, and provided an

opportunity for women to start getting involved in political action.

Although political education was an important goal of the Vicaría from the beginning, it

was not a goal of the women themselves. It is here that we see the true value of the *arpillera*

movement as a collaborative effort. Without the economic incentive, the political and artistic

goals of the Vicaría would have been largely impossible: the women were preoccupied with the

everyday crises of the dictatorship and did not have time to consider broader questions of

citizenship or political mobilization. Franceschet emphasizes the fact that in the informal

political sector, many women did not recognize their own actions as political, because "their

activity is not directed by or associated with political parties, and they do not necessarily seek

direct influence over government policy." Instead, the women of the *arpillera* movement were

involved in the "survival-oriented activities that are dominant in poor communities throughout

Chile" (6). It is for this reason that I argue against the idea that Chilean women were involved in

arpillera production for the purpose of preserving memory or political activism: without the

economic motivation, it is unlikely that there would have been enough participation for the

movement to be effective. The economic element of the *arpillera* movement was what allowed

the political and artistic goals to be achieved.

Once the economic, political, and artistic elements were combined, the *arpillera*

movement could become a large-scale movement of resistance, working across political,

geographic, and social boundaries to combat the power of the dictatorship. As both domestic and

international pressure increased, the people of Chile became more vocal in their dissent, and in

1988, Pinochet was forced to hold a plebiscite to legitimize his government. In the famous "no"

vote that followed, the Chilean people voted 54% to 43% against the dictatorship, and in 1990,

after seventeen years, Pinochet stepped down (Agosín, xviii). Chile then began its return to

democracy and embarked on a long road of national recovery. Once again, the *arpillera*

movement adjusted to the changing needs of the women who sewed them. For many years, the

dictatorship was considered too painful to discuss openly, and it wasn't until recently that Chile

began to confront its past. Chileans still struggle to comprehend this part of their history; for the

older generation, Pinochet is still a topic of extreme sensitivity. However, national healing and

recovery requires the study of the human rights violations of the dictatorship, and the

commemoration of the people who suffered under the regime. It is in this process of

remembrance and reconciliation that the *arpilleras* gained recognition as valuable historic art

works.

The second edition of *Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love*, includes a new first chapter

that addresses the events that have occurred since the original version was published in 1996.

Marjorie Agosín returns to the idea that the *arpilleras* shape, preserve, and repurpose memory. Recognizing her book itself as a form of testimony, Agosín seeks to reexamine the metaphorical and physical spaces the *arpilleras* occupy in the present day. She writes of the importance of these tapestries in a variety of contexts, as historical artifacts, as an element of Chilean cultural identity, or as part of a broader discussion about human rights all over the world. *Arpilleras* are unique in that they can be classified and studied by everyone from feminists to human rights' activists to historians, and yet cannot be completely understood except from an interdisciplinary perspective. They are rooted in the specific local conditions of the Santiago shantytowns during the dictatorship, and were able to succeed only by responding to those conditions. As Agosín writes, they should not be seen as "artifacts narrating a history, but as works of art describing historical circumstances illustrated in fabric," and therefore their legacy will "continue to be an enormous force in the historical memory of Chile" (19).

If you visit the *Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos* (Museum of Memory and Human Rights) in Santiago, and walk to the third floor, you can visit the small white hallway where *arpilleras* are on display. The museum was founded by president Michelle Bachelet in 2010, with the goal of being "a space designed to give visibility to the human rights violations that occurred in Chile between 1973 and 1990; to dignify the victims and their families; and to simulate reflection and debate about the importance of respect and tolerance, so that these events will never be repeated" ("Sobre el Museo").[13] The inclusion of the *arpilleras* in this space of memory draws attention not only to their historical importance as a social and political movement, but also to their continuing significance as objects of memory and symbols of popular resistance. However, they remain tucked away in a back corner of a third-floor hallway,

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[13] This statement is taken from the Memory Museum's website; the translation is my own.

away from the main exhibits and the majority of visitors. Their location in the museum is a reminder that even today, the significance of these works can be easily overlooked as they remain an afterthought to discussions about the dictatorship. I maintain that the *arpillera* movement should be recognized as an important model of resistance by a marginalized group, and a key example of how art can inspire concrete change in the face of oppression.

Building off the work that has been done by scholars such as Marjorie Agosín, Jacqueline Adams, and others, I have made the argument that the Chilean *arpillera* movement was successful because it brought individuals and organizations together across national and international boundaries to resist the Pinochet dictatorship. Although scholarship tends to focus on the *arpilleras* as either instruments of memory preservation, or of political and economic empowerment, few give equal weight to the variety of functions performed by the tapestries and the workshops in which they were produced. The *arpillera* movement was sustainable and productive because it explicitly involved various actors in various spheres; it connected shantytown women with religious organizations as well as with political exiles, external organizations, and the international community. Without any of these contributors, the movement would have been less effective, and in many cases, practically impossible.

In addition, I argue against the idea that the purpose of the *arpilleras* was primarily to preserve memory. Rather, I emphasize that while women may have appreciated the symbolic value of *arpillera* creation, their motives were primarily economic. In oppressive circumstances, therefore, pragmatic creative interventions must not only provide a creative outlet but also a practical solution to the issues faced by marginalized populations. Eve Kalyva writes that in order to subvert oppressive power structures, disruptive cultural projects must formulate "a new mode of practice that engages the political, economic, and cultural spheres of activity," through

which they "cause paradigm shifts in the conceptualization of cultural production as a shared social practice and develop new modes and vocabularies not only of critical expression but also of political action," (63-64). They must transform the act of art-making into something more than a symbolic act, as the *arpillera* workshops did by providing a forum for converting women into conscious political actors. The *arpillera* movement creatively engaged diverse actors to respond to and alter the situation of the Chilean people, and therefore stands as an early example of an artistic movement that initiated social, economic, and political change.

Chapter 3

Urban Transformation and the Medellín International Poetry Festival

There is something, it seems, about Colombia and superstar mayors. Doris Sommer

opened *The Work of Art in the World* with an analysis of Bogotá's Antanas Mockus, who

transformed the city with his platform of *cultura ciudadana* (civic culture) in the late 1990s and

early 2000s. Mockus's Wikipedia page notes that he is not only a politician but also a

mathematician and philosopher, which might strike one as a strange background for a public

servant ("Antanas Mockus"). But revolutionary mayors with unique pasts appear to be just what

Colombia needs. At first glance, Sergio Fajardo shares some uncanny similarities with Mockus.

Born only four years after Mockus, the Colombian Green Party politician holds a Ph.D. in

mathematics from the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and has been known to demonstrate

political strategies with formulas. He has also held two terms in office, as mayor of Medellín

from 2004 to 2007, and then as governor of Antioquia, the department that includes Medellín as

its capital city ("Building Peace in Colombia"). He is similarly credited with the transformation

of an entire city, popularly known as the "Medellín miracle." And clearly Mockus has

recognized the similarity between the two men's approaches; when Mockus ran for president in

2010, he chose Fajardo as his running mate (Lozano).

Medellín, known as Colombia's second city, faced many of the same problems as Bogotá

in the 1990s. Commonly recognized from the popular TV show *Narcos*, the city earned its fame

as the home of the drug lord Pablo Escobar and the Medellín cartel. Then known as the crime

capital of the world, in 1991 Medellín had a murder rate of 380 for every 100,000 people; by

contrast, the world's most dangerous city today has a murder rate of only 120 per 100,000.[14] By 2011, the murder rate in Medellín was 70 per every 100,000 people, a decrease of over 80% ("The World's Most Violent Cities"). Education and city-wide programming have increased, as has tourism. Visitors come to see the library-parks, outdoor escalators, and cable cars that are unique to the neighborhoods of Medellín. The city has received international recognition for its transformation, and although there are those who point to continuing issues of security, by most accounts the city is leaps and bounds ahead of where it was in 1990 (Brodzinsky).

Many urban development scholars have studied the evolution of the so-called 'Medellín miracle'. There is abundant research on the nature of the city's turbulent past abounds, much of it focusing on how urban violence has affected social, political, and economic development. The current literature places a strong emphasis on how violence affects the lives of the urban poor, both in Colombia and in Latin American cities in general. In their overview of urban violence in the region, scholars Caroline Moser and Cathy McIlwaine describe how violence in Latin American cities became an everyday phenomenon. Homicide rates are the standard measure of violence in urban areas, and the two development researchers point out that in the year 2000, Latin America had an estimated average homicide rate of 27.5 for every 100,000 people. The worldwide average at the time was 5, less than one-fifth of the Latin American figure. They also trace the evolution of theories about the cause of urban violence, especially in relation to poverty. They note that while violence was originally attributed to poverty alone, numerous studies have changed this perception, leading researchers to conclude that "inequality and exclusion, associated with unequal distribution of economic, political, and social resources in urban contexts, intersect with poverty to precipitate violence" (90). Researchers and scholars

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[14] This is the 2015 murder rate for Caracas, Venezuela, which was the highest in the world that year according to Worldatlas.com. Medellín did not rank among the top 50 cities.

commonly apply concepts of space and exclusion in the context of Medellín, and I will return to these points later in this chapter.[15]

Moser and McIlwaine also performed their own, locally-based qualitative research on urban violence. Using participatory urban appraisals (PUAs), the team analyzed everyday violence in eighteen communities in Guatemala and Colombia. Their goal was to understand urban crime through "a holistic framework that positions violence in terms of three interrelated components," in order to identify a comprehensive solution to the problem. To do this they first categorized different types of crime, identified underlying factors, and then evaluated causes and costs of violence in each community (91). In their work, they also outline numerous strategies that have been used to work towards violence reduction, and match them with the types of violence that they address. For example, the authors identify a "public health approach" which aims to prevent violence by reducing individual risk factors, and thus addresses economic and social violence. Moser and McIlwaine offer their model as a guideline for how to analyze urban violence and then tailor interventions depending on the needs of the local community. Rather than providing a generalized policy prescription, the team offers a way of diagnosing violence on a case-by-case basis, and then recommends a series of possible strategies that can be applied in different situations.

Moser and McIlwaine are not the only scholars to forego the one-size-fits-all model in favor of a more comprehensive approach to development. One of the best explanations of this shift comes not from urban studies research but rather from the field of development economics,

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[15] Other important developments in research approaches to urban development have included a shift towards a more nuanced understanding of the effects of persistent violence, and particularly a recognition of the longer-term economic consequences. These economic effects have been quantified: in Colombia, it is estimated that country-wide conflict cost the nation 3.1% of its GDP each year between 1991 and 1996. This amounted to roughly 18% of its GDP over five years, representing an enormous economic cost (Moser & McIlwaine, 90).

which focuses on strategies for growth on the macro, or country-wide, level. One of the most

well-known advocates of this new approach is Dani Rodrik, who is an economist and the Ford

Foundation Professor of International Political Economy at Harvard's school of government. In

his seminal 2010 article, "Diagnostics before Prescription", Rodrik argues that despite incredible

research efforts, the major economic development strategies of the past have proved ineffective

on a global scale. Particularly relevant for Latin America were attempts at economic growth via

import substitution, and then via recommendations of the Washington Consensus, neither of

which led to widespread success. By contrast, China and other recently developed Asian

countries had no traditional economic research behind their development strategies, and yet saw

far more economic growth over the past forty years. Rodrik asserts that rather than searching for

a universal development approach, our modern world requires a framework that countries can

use to evaluate their unique conditions and apply policies accordingly.[16] The similarities between

Rodrik's growth diagnostics and Moser and McIlwaine's framework for analyzing urban

violence are not coincidental. Rather, all three authors are arguing for a more nuanced approach

to economic development. Recent scholars and researchers of urban development have reiterated

the need for experimentation and creativity based on the unique problems and assets of each city.

In this vein, my goal is to analyze the transformation of Medellín from an

interdisciplinary perspective grounded in the unique political, social, and cultural conditions that

define the city. I adopt an approach based on Moser and McIlwaine's model, in which I seek to

outline the specific types of violence and violence-related issues faced by Medellín. I then

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[16] Towards this end, Rodrik and his colleagues developed a model of "growth diagnostics", which he describes as "a framework that sketches a systematic process for identifying binding constraints," "helping decision makers choose the right model (and remedy) for their specific realities" (35). Rodrik published this article in 2010, but the paper on this strategy was first distributed in 2005, and has been adopted already by many researchers. The "growth diagnostics" model provides a method for identifying signs of different types of development issues, and emphasizes the importance of instituting polices that are context-specific.

examine how specific policies and programs were designed to address those issues. To do this, I will give a general overview of the history of the city and its social problems, and then describe the academic theories that have been applied. I argue that thus far, academic theories regarding the transformation of the city have focused on government policy changes and infrastructural developments, while other projects have received less attention. I assert that the "Medellín miracle" is due not only to government investment in physical projects but also to a larger movement towards transforming citizens' and outsiders' perceptions of Medellín as an urban space. Focusing on the establishment and development of the Medellín International Poetry Festival, I analyze the ways in which collaborative art initiatives such as the festival have transformed both physical and discursive representations of the city. I argue that public art projects not only provided a forum for public assembly, but also invited Medellín residents to become active participants in the transformation of their city.

Violence in Medellín has been historically tied to the presence of armed groups in the city. In *Fractured Cities*, a book examining violence and other social issues in various Latin American cities, Ralph Rozema explains that even though Medellín was a historically prosperous city, the existence of conflicting, often violent organizations has plagued working-class neighborhoods since the 1980s.[17] Rozema uses the framework that Moser and McIlwaine propose to understand the types and effects of violence that existed in Medellín in the 1980s and

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[17] The arrival of Pablo Escobar and the gradual growth of the Medellín drug cartel in the early 1980s led to increased inequality across the city, with violence surging in the poor areas where the cartel did business. Even after the death of Escobar and the disbanding of the Medellín cartel in 1992, violence remained endemic in the city. The power void was filled by other armed groups, who competed for control of different areas in the city. As Rozema writes, "*bandas* (gangs), left-wing militias, *narcotraficantes* (drugs traffickers), *sicarios* (hired killers), *oficinas* (sophisticated criminal organizations), death squads dedicated to social cleansing, guerilla fighters… and various groups of right-wing paramilitaries," all formed "intricate networks of power relations" (57-58). Guerilla and paramilitary groups gained power in the absence of the cartels, and in addition to using violence and intimidation to control certain areas, they would often impose rules on the people who lived there. They would also recruit new local members for their troops, often youth who turned to these organizations in the absence of other opportunities.

90s. He writes of the normalization of violence in all three spheres that Moser and McIlwaine identify: political, economic, and social. Moving beyond simple measures such as homicide rates, Rozema reiterates the theorists' arguments about the effects of violence on social, human, and physical capital within the city. He emphasizes various types of urban violence led to the loss of public trust, loss of investments in physical and developmental projects, and loss of educational and employment opportunities for youth. As violence became an everyday occurrence, residents imposed additional restrictions on the way that they traveled within the city, only using certain streets or modes of transportation that they deemed safe. Rozema writes of the residual effects of a long-term climate of fear, explaining that even the threat of violence is enough to result in "the curtailment of many social spaces," as well as the shortening of "future perspectives of individuals and communities as a whole" (64). In many ways, therefore, violence became embedded in the daily lives of the urban laboring classes, saturating the choices they made and the spaces they were permitted to inhabit.[18]

The issue of contested space in Medellín has been singled out as one of the primary concerns for both academics and politicians. Divisions in terms of security, access to services and opportunities, and overall quality of life were strongly dependent on the physical space one occupied within the city.[19] The bustle of the city center and the highly developed wealthy areas contrast with the poor communities located on the outskirts and up into the mountains; these areas, known as *comunas*, have suffered from a lack of resources and attention, both from the

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[18] Rozema notes that although levels of violence differed depending on whether one was in a zone of conflict or an area controlled by only one group, psychological, social, and economic detriments were widespread. Those who could leave poor, violent areas did, and those who could not did their best to survive with what they had. This process exacerbated preexisting inequalities: the poor became further concentrated in violent areas without any means of escape (Rozema, 61).

[19] Rozema notes that spatial inequality in Medellín has its roots in the uneven industrialization and development of the city. The city center, he writes, is filled with "modern office buildings and shopping areas," whereas in the north-east and north-west outskirts of the city, regions where rural migrants settled when they arrived in the mid-1900s, basic infrastructure is still missing (58).

government and from the business that have established themselves in the main part of the city.[20] Thus, the transformation of Medellín meant addressing underlying issues of inequality that were mapped largely in terms of the physical space of the city.

Urban development theorists often refer to the difference between "space" and "place", using the former to refer to physical regions or structures in the city, and the latter to talk about the significance of those spaces. In the context of Medellín, I use these the terms space and place as they are defined by the Project for Public Spaces. On the PPS website, scholar Annah MacKenzie defines public space as "publicly owned land that, in theory, is open and accessible to all members of a given community—regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, age, or socio-economic level" (MacKenzie). These include streets, parks, libraries, community buildings, transportation systems, and other outdoor spaces in which city life occurs. Places, by contrast, are defined as "environments in which people have invested meaning over time"; a place "has its own history—a unique cultural and social identity that is defined by the way it is used and the people who use it." Public spaces are necessary for the creation of a place, but places do not simply emerge out of a collection of public spaces. Places must be developed through cultural and social interaction, and Medellín's transformation involved not only a reinvention of physical space, but also a redefinition of the city as a metaphorical place. "Placemaking," therefore, is "the process by which a physical environment is made meaningful, or by which a public space becomes a place" (MacKenzie).

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[20] This phenomenon is not uncommon in Latin America, where cities tend to be highly fragmented in terms of economic and social inequality. In the introduction to *Fractured Cities*, editors Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt write that Latin American urban societies "constitute a coexistence of contradictory social and spatial elements within the same social-geographical space."

Medellín's 'placemaking process' is most often analyzed in terms of the social urbanism

policy model attributed to the political party *Compromiso Ciudadano*[21] and Sergio Fajardo, a

party member and mayor of the city between 2004 and 2007. Social urbanism refers to a policy

approach designed to target poor, peripheral areas of the city, precisely those spaces that have

become isolated due to violence. Under social urbanism, impoverished areas receive large

infrastructural and programming investments that reintegrate these populations into urban

society. A vast amount of urban development literature has described and critiqued social

urbanist policies in Medellín. The most extensive work on the subject is by Kate Maclean, whose

2015 book *Social Urbanism and the Politics of Violence: The Medellín Miracle*, explains the

theory of social urbanism and details the evolution of Medellín's urban renewal. Maclean, a

lecturer of social geography at Birkbeck, University of London, evaluates the political and

economic processes that led to the emergence of social urbanist policies.[22] Her work is unique in

that it emphasizes the long-lasting institutional, social, and economic changes that made the

'Medellín Miracle' possible. Unlike other scholars who focus on infrastructure projects, Maclean

argues that "Compromiso Cuidadano and its social urbanism agenda were effective precisely

because of the balance achieved, politically and discursively, between challenging the powers-

that-be and appealing to elite tastes, priorities, and economic interests" (122). Throughout the

book, Maclean emphasizes the impossibility of outlining all the factors that contributed to

violence reduction in the city, and she focuses on those processes which she believes altered

crucial power dynamics. Although she discusses the importance of various non-government

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[21] In English, "Citizen Commitment" or "Citizen Engagement."

[22] Maclean explains that in the 1990s, a combination of factors altered power dynamics in Medellín's economic and political spheres. These factors included the new national Constitution adopted in 1991, an economic crisis that brought globalization to the forefront, and public outrage as violence peaked. These factors, as well as support from urban elites on certain renewal projects, led to the success of Compromiso Ciudadano, the political party that initiated social urbanism reforms and that would eventually choose Sergio Fajardo as their candidate for mayor.

actors such as NGOs, she does not provide an extensive analysis of creative public activities such as the Medellín Poetry Festival, which emerged alongside the political and economic changes of the 1990s.

Despite the vast amount of literature on the so-called 'Medellín miracle', the importance of creative and cultural development has gone largely unrecognized.[23] Part of this, I believe, is due to the lack of recognition of overlap between cultural and social spheres and economic growth in developing nations. With the notable exception of the United Nations' Report on the Creative Economy, scholars rarely address creative cities in the context of the developing world.[24] The existence of a creative economy presumes a post-industrialist city, one in which infrastructure is already in place and simply needs to be repurposed for cultural use. However, I argue that creative economies are not exclusively phenomena of the developed world. Rather, creative and cultural initiatives can contribute to strong and sustainable processes of urban development. Medellín, for example, has always had a vibrant and unique culture, and *Paisas*, as the city's residents are known, maintain a strong passion for music, art, and other forms of cultural expression (Rozema, 69). Some scholars have mentioned the renewal of the city's cultural and social spheres, but few have thoroughly analyzed their importance in the creation of

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[23] Research on the 'Medellín Miracle' abounds. In an April 2011 article written for the Overseas Development Institute, Milford Bateman, and Juan Pablo Duran Ortíz, Kate Maclean assert that the city of Medellín is a Latin American pioneer in creating what they call a "local development state (LDS)." They write that "sub-national levels of government can, and should, be pro-active in building the institutional and organizational infrastructures required for growth-oriented micro-, small, and medium enterprises to emerge and succeed" (2). In a 2015 article, scholar Luisa Sotomayor discusses the importance of space in solving issues of inequality in Medellín. She aims to identify key elements of successful "urban development projects (UDPs)" such as the ones applied in Medellín, which she says are "employed to trigger market-driven socio-spatial transformations in derelict areas of a city" (373). Ivan Turok, a human sciences researcher, writes that social urbanism reflects "a consistent commitment to social inclusion and equality," and focuses not only on physical improvements but also on projects that repurposed old spaces to drive economic development (575). He writes that a fundamental goal of social change was reaffirmed and strengthened by "a spirit of resilience and unity among the local population," but notably does not explore the roots or expressions of this local spirit, an element which I consider essential to the success of Medellín's renewal.

[24] See my "Introduction" for more on the UN Report as well.

a new urban environment.[25] I argue that the transformation of physical urban spaces would not

have been possible without a simultaneous transformation of the way citizens interacted with and

within those spaces. This parallel transformation occurred through participatory public events

and activities that reconnected citizens with their city as a place. One such event was the

Medellín Poetry Festival.

Years before Fajardo became mayor and theories of placemaking and social urbanism

were published, a group of poets decided to transform the public spaces of Medellín through

poetry. The Medellín Poetry Festival was held for the first time on April 28th, 1991, when the

city was experiencing peak levels of violence, unrest, and instability. The festival was an

initiative of *Prometeo*, an art and poetry corporation that began as a poetry magazine in the

1980s.[26] With management help from the government of Cerro Nutibara, a hill in the city, a

group of founding poets held the first festival, which was originally called *Un día con la poesia*

(One day with poetry). Thirteen Colombian poets spoke at the event, and 1,500 people attended

the day's events. The festival's website explains that from its inception, the festival "fue una

colectiva vital, una intervención del espacio social, con la palabra poética como medio conductor

de un ánimo vivificante, justo cuando muchos perdían la vida absurdamente, entre el horror de la

matanza"[27] ("Historia del festival"). The poets and organizers who planned the event recognized

the potential of poetry as an opportunity for individual expression, but also as a collective act of

reclaiming physical and social space within the city. For one day, people were invited out into

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[25] The 2013 UN Creative Economy Report includes a short case study on Medellín, discussing the construction of library-parks as well as the cultural initiatives that took place in the city, and citing the importance of culture as "a right, not a privilege," ("Creative Economy Report", 81).

[26] The two main promoters and founders of the Poetry Festival were Fernando Rendon and Angela Garcia, who are poets and the editors of *Prometeo* ("Festival Internacional de Poesía").

[27] In English, "a vital reunion, an intervention in social space, with the poetic word as a way of conveying an exhilarating mood, right when many had completely lost their lives, in the horror of the killings." All translations are my own.

public spaces and provided an opportunity to express and the frustration, grief, and helplessness of daily life.

The Medellín poetry festival grew dramatically over the next few years. In its second year, the festival grew to a full week in length, and included 37 poets from eight different countries in Europe and the Americas. Over the seven days of the event, over 20,000 people attended. The third festival, in 1993, saw the introduction of readings in the streets and in neighborhoods, which extended the spatial reach of the performances and brought the event to more of the city's residents. Even as conflict and violence increased in Medellín and across the country, the festival continued to grow. Poets were invited from all around the world, to speak in a variety of languages and in whatever form they desired. By the fifth festival, poets represented in all six continents, the opening and closing readings were held in the emblematic Cerro Nutibara amphitheater, and almost 60,000 people attended over the course of the week ("Historia del festival").

It became clear, by the number of attendees and the response of Medellín's citizens, that the festival had touched a certain nerve in the city's collective consciousness. Poetry had always been uniquely important to the people of Medellín, and newspaper clippings from the early years of the festival show that the event quickly became embedded in *paisa* culture. In August 1992, after the second annual poetry festival, a Colombian cultural magazine called *La Gaceta de Colcultura* published a piece called "Fervor de Medellín." In it, author Antonio Conte describes the popularity of poetry in Medellín, writing that despite the violence that had become so entrenched in the city, "casi todo el mundo por allá tiene algo que ver con la poesía"[28] (Conte). He explains that by uniting people from different socioeconomic, ethnic, and geographic

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[28] In English, "Almost everyone in that region has something to do with poetry."

backgrounds, the international festival reminded Colombia and the world that poetry comes

from, and exists for, everyone. He expresses his admiration and appreciation for the work that

the festival is doing, and of the significance of the event both for Medellín and for all of

Colombia. In conclusion, he writes, "No hay mejor antídoto contra la violencia real y exagerada

que convirtió a Medellín en la antesala de la muerte. Mañana puede convertirse en el centro vivo

del amor" (Conte).[29]

The organizers themselves describe the importance of the event as being "more than a

literary gesture." *Prometeo* writes that the festival began to provide a way of coping with the

horrors of the time, and of coming together as a city to break the silence that was the result of so

much collective fear. The festival was rooted in poetry, but it was more than an artistic event; the

act of gathering and speaking out in a public space provided a forum for the recognition and

discussion of everyday problems. In *Beyond the Page: Poetry and Performance in Spanish

America*, Jill Kuhnheim explains the many ways in public performance transforms poetry itself

and the purpose it serves. She writes that in many situations, live poetry can "open up or

democratize culture," and emphasizes that these performances are "hybrid cultural artifacts that

attest to changing cultural environments" (7-8). Through poetic performance, groups that had no

political, social, or economic power found that they still had cultural power, which they could

exercise by participating in the festival. As civil war rocked the country, and violence by

guerrilla and paramilitary groups escalated, the festival became a participatory act of solidarity, a

vocal outlet for the otherwise voiceless.

Although the festival and other Medellín arts initiatives may be under-analyzed in formal

academic literature, the event has received considerable attention in popular spheres. Amateur

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[29] In English, "There is no better antidote against the real and exaggerated violence that has converted Medellín into the hall of death. Tomorrow it can become the living center of love."

filmmakers have documented the festival since its inception, and although a professional

documentary wasn't produced until 2008, the internet contains thousands of videos of poetry

readings, workshops, and speeches. Describing the use of media in the poetry world, Kuhnheim

writes that in contrast with the written word, digital recordings can "create a more direct

engagement of the senses and supply information about the context of the performance itself to

produce meaning in addition to that of the written language" (9). From an analytical perspective,

then, I analyze these clips and the 2008 documentary as primary sources that highlight the

inclusive nature of the festival, and help explain how the people of Medellín interpreted the

festival's significance. Videos of all the poetry readings, even from the early years, use similar

cinematic techniques to portray the events. Most noticeably, camera shots do not focus on the

reader, but rather switch between readers and the audience, and show the audience interacting

with each other and the reader. In most clips, there are large crowds present, and listeners are

included as active participants in the performance. Although these clips lack professional quality,

these elements serve both to demonstrate and magnify the public, participatory nature of the

festival.

     In a powerful video from the first poetry festival, Carlos Enrique Ortiz, a Colombian poet

and a native of Medellín, recites a poem in which he speaks plainly about daily life on the streets

in Colombia. He reads "Es la calle/en la que el hombre camina y respira/como quien agoniza sin

saberlo."[30] He describes the invisibility of each individual on the streets, the fact that if he dies,

all that matters is his name, which becomes "uno mas en una lista, en otra, uno menos."[31]

Enrique Ortiz describes the reality of everyday violence in cities such as Medellín, where poor

communities experience crime and death regularly, with no justice for the victims or their

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[30] In English, "The street/in which the man walks and breathes/like someone who agonizes without knowing."
[31] In English, "One more on one list, on another, one less."

families. There is no hope of receiving answers, and no hope of anything changing. Violence has become so embedded in the community that there is not even the chance of a better life for the next generation. Children, the poet reads "aprenden a cantar, 'de esta muerte comer, y beber de esta sangre.'"[32] In Medellín, violence is physically embodied in a way that only a poet can express. It is ingested, inhaled, so present in people's minds that it seems to float in the air. And the tangible and intangible effects of violence have destroyed any sense of place, or of community. The most powerful line of the poem reads, "No es este un país, sino la pesadilla de un muerto"[33] (Enrique Ortiz).

Enrique Ortiz is describing a country that is a shell of a place. Although he is writing about the country as a whole, his poem clearly resonates with the people of Medellín. These residents feel that they are being denied a place to live in, and instead merely exist within the physical space of the city. However, the performance of the poem in front of an audience suggests that the author is not only expressing the effects of everyday violence, but in fact also working to change those effects. The video shows a large audience listening to the poet speak, and clusters of people listening attentively, turning to their neighbor or conversing with a friend. Listening to a poem being read aloud, together with a large group, is a very different experience than reading a poem in a book. The poem becomes situated in a place and time, and is interpreted differently by the audience; it creates a sense of community for those who listen to it. As Kuhnheim explains, live performance transforms poetry from a literary act into a genre capable of "enabling grassroots cultural production and attracting broader audiences who in some cases become cultural participants" (137). By collectively listening to a poem, and by recognizing the shared reality that is being described, individual memories, thoughts, and feelings, are

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[32] In English, "learn to sing, 'eat of this death and drink of this blood."
[33] In English, "This is not a country, but the nightmare of a dead man."

understood as a shared experience. The video captures this effect in Medellín by incorporating both the performance and the street that the author talks about, by using long, sweeping shots of public spaces filled with people. Both the author's performance and the video of it are important examples of placemaking, in that they urge people to "collectively reimagine and public spaces at the heart of every community," and help strengthen "the connection between people and the places they share" ("What is Placemaking?"). The live and digital performances of Enrique Ortiz's poem work to erode the very invisibility and the placeless-ness he describes.

As violence in Medellín evolved and continued, the poetry festival became a symbol of the resilience of the Colombian people. The poetry festival of 1999, for example, began amid social, political, and economic turmoil. Three days before the festival began, the U.S. State Department issued a travel warning, recommending that Americans and other foreigners avoid travel to Colombia at the risk of being hurt or killed. An earthquake had killed hundreds of citizens in January, and worsening economic conditions led to store and bank closings. And yet, attendance at the poetry festival continued to increase. The Medellín School of Poetry, which began four years earlier, took place alongside the festival, and brought together young poets from all over the country for workshops, discussions, and readings. Even with the increase in readings, the presence of famous poets, and the international attention, the original purpose of the event remained clear. In their summary of the 1999 festival, *Prometeo* writes, "El Festival Internacional de Poesia en Medellín no surgió como un evento literario o como un encuentro de poetas. Surgió en 1991 para contraponer al lenguaje de matanza el poder vivificante de la imaginación poética" ("Historia del festival"). [34]

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[34] In English, "The Medellín International Poetry Festival did not emerge as a literary event or a conference for poets. It emerged in 1991 to counter the language of killing with the exhilarating power of the poetic imagination."

Another video performance from the festival documents a reading of "El combate

poético," written by Jorge Carrera Andrade, a famous twentieth-century Ecuadorian poet. [35] The

poem emphasizes the "exhilarating power" of poetry that *Prometeo* refers to, and begins with

line, "Tú me darás el arma poesía…" (Andrade). Carrera Andrade writes about the power of

poetry in terms of its strength: it provides not a tool or an antidote but a weapon, which can be to

transform a world of death and violence into one of light and harmony. The video clip recording

the performance of the poem reiterates that feeling of power. In it, a crowd of hundreds of people

reads the piece aloud as one. The reading is loud, emotional, and inclusive; the whole crowd is

participating, and at the end of the reading, they erupt in cheers. For a group of people so

intimately familiar with the presence of physical weapons, "El combate poético" not only

addresses the presence of violence but offers the people of Medellín their own weapon to

overcome it. The concluding lines of the poem read, "Tú me darás el arma, Poesía/para abolir el

reino del Oscuro/y devolver al hombre el patrimonio/de la luz transformada/en amor a las cosas

del planeta."[36] The poem is a both an ode to the power of poetry and a call to action for those

who read or hear it. Poetry should not be thought of as the property of the literary elite, but rather

an accessible weapon to be used by the common man against "the reign of Darkness."

The participatory performance of the poem at the festival reinforces the poem's original

meaning but also conveys an additional message about the power of collective action. The

citizens of Medellín are in the streets, engaging with one another in a cultural act of

perseverance. Peace is still a long way off, and poetry is not the sole answer to the city's

problems. But through the act of poetic performance, the people of Medellín see themselves as

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[35] In English, "The Poetic Fight."
[36] In English, "You give me the weapon, Poetry/to abolish the reign of Darkness/and return to man the legacy/of light transformed/into love for all the things of the planet."

having an identity, and as being part of a community. Jill Kuhnheim emphasizes that this

"communitarian and communicative aspect" of poetry is often acquired when pieces are

performed aloud rather than read silently. Quoting Peter Middleton's work on poetic

performance she writes, "'poetic utterances carry an assertoric force that depends on the presence

of the performative author, and the result is a local, momentary attempt to draw listeners closer

into such communities, however fragile and temporary" (121). In this case, there are many

performative authors, but the result is the same: participants come together in a public space to

share common sentiments and form a community, simultaneously reimagining themselves and

reclaiming the city as their own. This solidarity, and this willingness to recreate urban spaces

through cultural activity, form a crucial foundation for the transformation of Medellín ("Tú me

Darás el Arma Poesía").

Sergio Fajardo became Mayor of Medellín in 2004, and brought with him the sweeping

reforms of social urbanism. While urban development scholars and researchers tend to focus on

Fajardo's large infrastructural projects, speeches, interviews, and articles show that he and his

team appreciated the importance of creative and cultural projects. In a 2010 interview with

BOMB magazine, Fajardo discusses his administration's focus on eliminating fear from city

spaces, and on changing ways of life, not just architecture. He says "Our way of doing politics

was precisely to enter into direct contact with people and their communities in all their spaces…

There had to be a rupture from an established culture, a way of life that is often painful and

framed by violence" (Fajardo, 37). He stresses that new architectural structures provide no

benefit if the community doesn't participate in the process, or if they aren't used by the people

who live in the area. Fajardo also explains the importance of recreating the image of Medellín

both in the eyes of residents and of the international community. Residents needed to envision

their city as a place they were proud to live, or at least as containing elements they were proud to call their own. Similarly, international press that traditionally cultivated the image of a violent, war-torn Medellín worked against the city's attempts to transform itself, and discouraged tourism and economic investment that would aid the development process.

As Medellín began to emerge from the violence of the 1980s and 90s, the poetry festival evolved to serve a new purpose in the city's cultural, social, and economic spheres. The founders of the festival began with the goal of providing a social and cultural antidote to the violence of the city. But over time, the poetry festival evolved to work alongside and in conjunction with Fajardo's urban reforms. Fajardo did not come up with the poetry festival, but unlike previous mayors, he supported the event ("Festival Internacional de Poesía de Medellín"). The festival contributed to two of the mayor's main goals for the city: the participatory transformation of public spaces, and the reinvention of the image of Medellín for both residents and foreigners. Describing the 2008 festival, the organizers write that the Medellín Poetry Festival had gradually evolved from an act of resistance to a political movement in support of nationwide peace, as well as a creative movement promoting the culture of Medellín and artistic initiatives. They explain, "El objetivo mayor de este hecho cultural es proponer una salida de paz para Colombia y contribuir desde el arte y la creación a buscar soluciones a los problemas colombianos" ("Historia del Festival"). As the country began to work towards ending its civil war, the festival became more involved in political processes and in the formation of a new city and a new country. In 2003, *Prometeo* hosted the first World Summit of Poetry for Peace, bringing together poets, government representatives, NGO workers, cultural organizations, human rights organizations, and a variety of other actors. The group discussed five different categories regarding the possibility of a political option for peace, and published a declaration stating the

festival's support of a peace process. The organization continued its active involvement in working towards the end of the civil war, and hosted a second Summit for Peace and Reconciliation in 2015 ("I Cumbre Mundial de la Poesía").

In 2008, Cultures of Resistance Films made a short documentary entitled *The Transformation of a Drug Capital: The Medellín Poetry Festival.* The video highlights performances from the 18th poetry festival, as well as performers' thoughts on the importance of the festival and of poetry in general. The film is the first professional documentary that has been done on the festival, but it draws heavily on the same techniques and interpretations seen in the amateur videos. It includes the classic scenes of large groups of people, who fill outdoor spaces to listen to and participate in the creative act of poetry. The theme of participation is common throughout the film, which combines wide-angled panoramas of the festival's crowds with close-up shots of individuals reading poetry, watching performances, or commenting on the significance of poetry and the event. This technique draws attention to one of the themes that I argue is central to the importance of the festival: the integration of individuals into the broader community through cultural activities. As Juano Villafane, an Argentinian poet, states in the film, "Justamente, lo que permite la poesía, es una relación humana del hombre muy importante consigo mismo y con los demás" (*Transformation of a Drug Capital*). In many ways, the performances that take place at the festival, and the publication of these performances on the internet through videos, simply extend and deepen the power of poetry as a force for interaction and mobilization. The Cultures of Resistance film also emphasizes the importance of creative performance in transforming physical space into a discursive place, which implies social and cultural significance. The title of the film relates the festival to broader issues of drug trafficking and violence, and the film portrays not only the people of the festival but also the spaces,

showing wide views of the open-air theater in which festival-goers gather, even in the rain. The

documentary represents, cinematographically, the link between the new public spaces created

through social urbanism and the creative process that use those spaces to produce cultural,

political, and economic change.

Alongside the poetry festival itself, creative productions such as the Cultures of

Resistance Documentary helped transform international perceptions of Medellín as Latin

America's crime capital. Overtime, the festival, combined with Fajardo's architectural projects

and other arts and culture initiatives, fostered the development of a creative economy in

Medellín. Rather than being a center for crime, Medellín began to be recognized as a Latin

American center of arts, culture, and poetry. Now, blogs by young travelers are full of Medellín

enthusiasts who have fallen in love with the city's art scene, and arts magazines now include

headlines such as "Why Medellín, Colombia, Could Be the Next Major Art Destination"

(Richards). *Travel and Leisure'*s online South America section includes an article entitled

"Taking Stock of Medellin, Colombia's Growing Art Scene" (Wulfhart). Ten years ago, the

magazine's editors would have laughed at the thought of sending someone to Medellín for

leisure. Initiatives such as the Medellín Poetry Festival promote the development of what the UN

calls creative industries, which contribute to turning a public space into a unique place, and

simultaneously attract tourism and investment to the city. Medellín, then, is an essential example

of how creative economic activity can help transform cities in the developing world.

Many academics and politicians have yet to give sufficient attention to the poetry festival

in their analyses of Medellín. However, development organizations such as the United Nations,

and a few select researchers, have started to recognize the importance of art and culture in

Medellín's transformation. In 2006, the International Poetry Festival of Medellín was selected to

receive the Right Livelihood Award, commonly known as the 'Alternative Nobel Prize.'[37] On

their website, the Right Livelihood Award explains that the Festival was chosen as a recipient

"for showing how creativity, beauty, free expression and community can flourish amongst and

overcome even deeply entrenched fear and violence" ("Festival Internacional de Poesía"). The

Award also highlights the extensive outreach that *Prometeo* performs, both through their

International Poetry School and through the Gulliver project, which brings poetry to low-income

neighborhoods in the city. The recipience of the Right Livelihood Award shows that the poetry

festival is beginning to be recognized by the international community as a powerful example of

how creativity can transform developing cities. Although academic literature and urban theorists

may not be paying attention to these type of initiatives, the decision of the award committee

helped garner much-needed attention and respect for the event. By honoring the festival, the

Right Livelihood Award reaffirms the validity of the festival's motivation, stated by *Prometeo*

editor Fernando Rendón as "the conviction that culture must and has to play a fundamental role

in any processes of development" ("Festival Internacional de Poesía").

     In this chapter, I have argued that the continued presence of the festival in Medellín is

one example of how cultural projects contribute to urban renewal, and how artistic interventions

and urban development go hand in hand. Sergio Fajardo says that every architectural project his

government undertook was "researched: where it should end up, what the surroundings were

like, what the conditions were." Each project was not "an arbitrary intervention, but rather a

social intervention" (Fajardo, 38). From this perspective, social urbanism and poetry festivals are

not all that different. Rather than placing political and cultural projects in different boxes for the

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[37] The Right Livelihood is an annual award that was established in 1980 to "honor and support courageous people and organizations offering visionary and exemplary solutions to the root causes of global problems." It provides a monetary award to help fund the ongoing work of individuals or groups who are successfully changing the future for people around the world (www.rightlivelihoodaward.org/honour/about-the-right-livelihood-award/).

purposes of analysis, I argue that both should be seen as different forms of creative interventions, which are effective precisely because they are interdisciplinary. In order to find comprehensive solutions to urban violence, economic investments such as Fajardo's infrastructure projects must be understood as social and cultural interventions, and cultural initiatives such as the Medellín Poetry Festival must be understood as social, economic, and spatial activities. Medellín serves as evidence that from the top, governments and cultural organizations can use interdisciplinary analysis and creative, multidimensional projects to involve their citizens in participatory urban change.

Chapter 4

Mexico and the Case for Artistic Activism

Throughout Latin America, art and development are becoming reconnected in powerful ways. The United Nations Creative Economy Report writes of "a continental tradition of linking culture to social rights and quality of life issues," and an emerging recognition of the economic value of the creative industries. Increasingly, scholars, artists, and politicians are realizing that culture is one of the region's strongest assets when it comes to stimulating economic and political change. Paraphrased by Doris Sommer in *The Work of Art in the World*, Mexican artist Pedro Reyes admits that "Latin America may be unstable politically and poor by economic measures… but it is incredibly rich in creativity" (82). When he was commissioned to create a piece of art for Culiacán's botanical gardens, Reyes decided to use repurpose his creative ability to produce social impact. Culiacán is the capital of Sinaloa, one of Mexico's most violent states and home of the Sinaloa drug cartel. As of 2010, 90% of all Mexican cartel-related executions occurred in Sinaloa, and Culiacán itself was one of the four municipalities in Mexico that together account for 36% drug-related homicides (Cueva Navarro). Rather than simply create a piece of art, Reyes decided to use his installation as part of a bigger project that would address drug violence and the presence of illegal weapons in Culiacán.

In a project called *Palas por Pistolas (Guns into Shovels)* (2008), Reyes collaborated with the Mexican government and with department stores in the area to incentivize gun owners to turn in their weapons in exchange for vouchers that could be used to buy appliances and electronic devices. Reyes publicly destroyed the weapons he collected by crushing them with a steamroller and then melted down their metal parts to create shovels. He then distributed the shovels among schools, museums, and other organizations, and they were used to plant trees

around Culiacán. Through his project, Reyes collected 1,527 weapons from citizens, 40% of which were automatic weapons designated for military use only. The 1,527 shovels that were created went on to travel the world, and were used to plant trees in places such as Paris, Vancouver, and Marfa, Texas (Reyes, "Palas por Pistolas"). Reyes describes the project as both a physical transformation of materials as well as a symbolic transformation from death to life. As he writes on his website, the process had "a pedagogical purpose of showing how an agent of death can become an agent of life" (Reyes, "Palas por Pistolas"). Doris Sommer explains that *Palas por Pistolas* was so successful that Reyes started receiving more confiscated weapons from the military, who had no use for the guns and so he created a second project, *Imagine* (2012), which turned pieces of the weapons into musical instruments. Sommer writes that these pieces "enabled [Reyes] to engage with the existing culturally constructed world," because "the work of making art in complicated contexts promised real results" (84-85).

Reyes' two projects are powerful artistic commentaries on the cycle of violence in Culiacán and in much of Mexico, but what distinguishes pragmatic creative interventions is that they ultimately produce social, economic, or political change. Therefore, the question becomes whether or not *Palas por Pistolas* had a significant impact on the Culiacán community. Harvard scholar Ana Paola Cueva Navarro argues that it did. In her 2012 article "*Palas por Pistolas*: Art as a Tool for Social Change", Cueva Navarro asserts that in order to solve widespread violence, drug trafficking, and political corruption, "Mexican society needs to experience a dramatic change and start reclaiming its country through innovation and art" (Cueva Navarro, 36). She writes that *Palas por Pistolas* uses "participation/protest, destruction, and transformation" to contribute to this process of societal change (37). Cueva Navarro understands that the value of pieces such as Reyes' lies not in their ability to provide complete solutions, but rather to change

social and institutional norms. She notes that although it is hard to measure the statistical effects of *Palas por Pistolas*, she emphasizes that the growth of the project into a sponsored organization is a telling sign of success. Cueva Navarro draws on Sommer to support her argument about how innovative art can disrupt society and transform public opinion, and refers to prominent Mexican politicians who believe that the country's war on drugs can only be solved by transforming people and institutions from the ground up. Cueva Navarro concludes that although "further examination is unquestionably needed" in order to evaluate the tangible results of *Palas por Pistolas*, the project is already successful as "a transmutation through destruction and more importantly through the use of innovation and imagination" (38).

I hesitate to agree with Cueva Navarro's assertion that "the most important change cannot be measured with numbers" (38), and the issue of measuring impact is one I address in the conclusion of this thesis. However, I do believe that Cueva Navarro, Sommer, and Reyes have identified a crucial category of creative interventions: activist art. The projects I have discussed in previous chapters involved using art to approach broader local problems, but the relationship between art and development goes both ways. I now want to address how development can be used to approach art. This chapter focuses primarily on artists who have taken on the responsibility of using their work to produce social, political, and economic outcomes. These individuals are redefining art as a tool for change. Take Reyes, for example. In reflecting on his work, the artist noticed that his projects "begin either as art and end up as social intervention, or they flip the other way around" (Sommer, 82). Cueva Navarro describes how Reyes, originally an architect, "has dedicated his career to using art to create opportunities for people to understand issues in different ways and imagine new possibilities" (36). *BOMB* magazine's Tatiana Cuevas writes that Reyes "has developed an arsenal of terms and forms to release

creativity from ordinary limitations," and that he "lives and works thinking of ways to improve the world" (Cuevas, 21).

Reyes is just one of many artistic activists who are working to change Mexico and the world. In this chapter, I define artistic activists: who they are, what they do, and how governments, organizations, or even individuals can cultivate them. I begin by introducing the theory behind artistic activism as an effective tool for change, relying primarily on the work of cultural activist scholar Stephen Duncombe. I then turn to the specific context of Mexico, tracing the evolution of activist art in the country and focusing on a few specific actors who are working to change the world they live in, either on a local or a global scale. I find that although Mexico may be lacking in the kind of top-down interventions that characterize Medellín or Bogotá, there are a multitude of individual artists who build on their country's long-standing artistic traditions to produce social, economic, and political change. I begin on the international level, examining the work of Guillermo Gómez Peña to clarify that not all artists, or even all art-activists, are engaging in the kinds of pragmatic creative interventions that are the subject of this thesis. I then proceed to discuss the work of other artistic activists, who, according to my criteria, initiate the kinds of localized innovation that can combat current issues of violence, corruption, and neighborhood safety. Focusing primarily on the work of Raul Cárdenas Osuna in Tijuana, I demonstrate how creativity can inspire action by everyday citizens, and how artists can work to realign their craft with the broader goals of social or economic justice, as well as political activism. In the final part of the chapter, I examine the issue of scale, and argue that through government, non-profit, or even activist-led programs, countries can motivate individuals to engage in creative projects to solve specific problems within their communities. These local

projects may then extend into broader regions, reaching the entire country or even international audiences.

In *The Work of Art in the World*, Doris Sommer uses the term "cultural agent" to describe "those who make, comment, buy, sell, reflect, allocate, decorate, vote, don't vote, or otherwise lead social, culturally constructed lives" (3). In this sense, she says, we all become cultural agents just by engaging in everyday interactions within our communities. "The appropriate question about agency," she writes, "is not if we exercise it, but how intentionally we do so, to what end and what effect" (4). When Sommer discusses cultural agents, however, she is referring specifically to those people who artist Pedro Reyes calls "connectionists." Sommer writes that these cultural agents, who include leaders such as Mockus and artists such as Reyes, are "masters of hybrid forms that link art with social development" (81). Similar to Sommer, Linda Dittmar and Joseph Entin write about the benefits of studying activist art in their 2010 article for the journal *Radical Teacher*. In "Jamming the Works: Art, Politics, and Activism," the two professors offer examples of "cultural work that slams conventional notions of the unique beauty of the handcrafted object as "art"—work that is disruptive, irreverent, and transformative" (3). They argue that art educators should focus on radical art that goes beyond the individual and "intervenes in the political order to make visible new possibilities for change" (8). They advocate a new educational focus on the ways in which art can be put to use to alter existing power systems and structures, rather than on how to define 'art' or 'activism' as concepts.

Activist art has been quickly gaining traction as a valuable tool for change and development in a variety of disciplines. [38] Social, economic, and political researchers have all

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[38] Throughout the chapter I refer alternatively to activist art, artistic activism, and artistic activists or art activists, but all are referencing the same general concept.

defined activist art and identified the ways in which it can contribute to sustainable change in their respective fields. In the political realm, scholars Mark Mattern and Nancy Love collected essays on activist art in their book *Doing Democracy: Activist Art and Cultural Politics*. In the introduction to the book, the two describe the wide variety of resources that art offers for use in political activism. They write that the arts can "contribute to political equality by increasing political capacity," open new spaces in which political action can take place, and have profound effects on individual character as well as group identity (9). They emphasize that in today's world, where younger generations often feel disconnected from and disillusioned with traditional politics, art offers ways of engaging citizens in participatory democracy. Mattern and Love write that "the arts and popular culture have long played a major role in shaping such a creative, expansive, and democratic understanding of the relationships between peoples and can do so today in new ways (12).

Mattern and Love's book focuses mostly on the aesthetic effects of art works that may or may not have been intended to produce concrete political change. However, in the conclusion to *Doing Democracy*, they address projects that are more closely aligned with activist art as I define it, that is, "intentional, directed attempts to use art to drive community development" (339). The two scholars identify two polarities at either end of a continuum of public arts projects: elites-driven projects on the one end, and on the other, community-driven art. Elites-drive projects are initiated by elite actors within a community, whether government officials, business leaders, or other prominent figures, and are aimed at creating artistic products. These top-down projects view artistic consumption as a form of public participation, and focus on the construction of a monument, a museum, or a cultural area rather than on the creative process itself. Community-driven projects, on the other hand, address local development from the bottom-up, aiming to

engage citizens in the creative process and alter daily life through cultural initiatives. Mattern and Love write that community-driven art projects "pursue goals that include supporting local artists, building social capital, increasing social cohesion and inclusion, addressing marginality, pursuing justice through collective action, and generating local development. Community arts seek to create a public and address a public issue, not just exist in a public space" (343). In a description reminiscent of my definition of pragmatic creative interventions, the authors write that successful community arts projects are "dialogic", "collaborative in nature", and "self-consciously activist in orientation" (343-344). Mattern and Love argue that it is this community-driven approach that has the most potential for expanding political power and creating more democratic societies.

In the field of social research, Stephen Duncombe is one of the preeminent scholars studying and promoting the use of art in activism. He is a professor and researcher at New York University, as well as a political activist who works in New York City. Duncombe has written extensively about cultural resistance and creative activism and has helped create the Center of Artistic Activism as well as Actipedia.org, a community-generated website that collects examples of creative activism around the world. In his 2016 article "Does it Work? The Æffect of Activist Art", Duncombe explains that the value of art activism is difficult to understand because they art and activism are typically understood to produce different results. Activism, he says, involves taking specific actions to dismantle traditional power structures within society, and often has a clearly defined goal. By contrast, art is often laden with more ambiguous meaning, designed to produce emotion but not necessarily directed towards a concrete goal. As he defines them, art generates affect, while activism generates effect. However, he says, these two goals are fundamentally intertwined: producing social change, or effect, requires changing

the way people think and feel in order to motivate that change, or generating affect. As Duncombe playfully puts it, "affect and effect are not discrete ends but are all up in each other's business" (119). Affect produces effect. Duncombe coins the term *æffect* to refer to the way in which art be used as a tool for social change, and argues that 'artivists' hold themselves to a higher standard than traditional artists. He goes on to lay out a methodology for evaluating the *æfficacy* of activist art, and argues that in order to take seriously the potential of art as a tool for change, artists and researchers must be willing to evaluate the success of art initiatives, and to understand that they sometimes fail. I will return to Duncombe's work in the conclusion, where I examine the issue of accountability.

Although academic research has addressed the theoretical importance of art in political and social activism, few scholars have written about specific art activists in Latin America. Scholarly papers tend to address large-scale projects such as the work of the Medellín government or the Chilean *arpillera* movement, but local projects led by individual artists receive far less attention. Using various examples from Mexico, I argue that small-scale arts initiatives are equally as important in producing social, economic, and political change within communities. These types of individually-led projects can be especially effective in countries such as Mexico, which lacks the strong institutions capable of producing large-scale initiatives. In many situations, individual actors and artists have the knowledge, creativity, and resources necessary to initiate socially-engaged art projects that alter the lives of a small population. Additionally, these locally-based initiatives sometimes morph into larger projects, jump-starting change outside of their original sphere.

Mexico has a long history with art activism. In *The Work of Art in the World*, Doris Sommer writes that few in the United States know that Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal

arts programs were inspired by its Southern neighbor, whose government had, years, earlier, sponsored various arts and educational programs to revive and reinvent the country after the Mexican Revolution (37). The famous Mexican muralists—Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Orozco—inspired citizens and the government to reconsider the role of art in their country's social and political advancement. But peripheral Mexican art flourished as well. In the 1920s and 30s, Mexican publications such as *El Machete* and *Frente a Frente* encouraged artists to use their craft as a method for the dissemination of political ideals (Azuela, 82). [39] Scholar Edward J. McCaughan, referencing a comment made by performance artist Maris Bustamente, writes of "a distinct logic that is at work in Mexico, where culture is deeply influenced by pre-colonial, indigenous structures of thought and aesthetics," and where "values from pre-Hispanic thought have been reproduced (and transformed) in daily life through symbols, rituals, ceremonies, fiestas, popular sayings, myths, oral histories, and the like" (McCaughan, 153). McCaughan writes that although Mexican political art has a long and rich history, new pieces distinguish themselves in the way that they transform traditions to contribute to "the cultural politics of social change" (155).[40] Art and culture, then, have always been essential to Mexican social and political development. I argue that individual art activists are now building on the country's history of artistic social engagement to intervene more directly in the everyday life of citizens.

The Mexican border region has long been a sight of cultural, political, and economic clashes. According to the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Latinos and Latinas in the United States*,

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[39] In English, "*The Machete*" and "*Face to Face*."

[40] McCaughan goes on to discuss artworks that he says engage the public and permit new ways of cultural and spiritual "knowing." Although the paintings he discusses certainly contribute to reforming individuals' conception of their place in society, and thus indirectly to social change, the art works I choose to examine go even further, taking social change and development as their explicit goal and not just their inspiration.

border art has its roots in the growing conflict of the 1980s, as the U.S.-Mexico boundary became increasingly militarized. The entry also states that the category of border art is not defined by form, but rather by its subject matter, which "often focuses on the social, political, and cultural realities of life in the United States–Mexico border region" (Latorre). Since the 1980s, various artists' collectives, festivals, and individual and collaborative works have shaped both the physical and creative space of the border region. Performances, murals, and installation art works continue to flourish along the boundary. These projects are supported by individual initiatives as well as festivals such as InSITE, a triennial exhibition that I will discuss later in this chapter (Latorre).

No discussion of Mexican border art is complete without the inclusion of Guillermo Gómez Peña, the performance artist responsible for installations such as *Temple of Confessions* and the international performance group Pocha Nostra. Although Gómez Peña is frequently referred to and analyzed as an art activist or a performance activist, I argue that Gómez Peña's work is not an example of a pragmatic creative intervention. This is not to say that his work is not extremely valuable as art, or that it has no place in longer term processes of change, but rather to point out that Gómez Peña does not work towards or produce the kind of localized development that is my object of study. Nevertheless, it is important to briefly examine his work, to make it clear that not all those who call themselves artist-activists, or undertake cultural initiatives, have or achieve the same goals. I assert that although Gómez Peña's work has an important cultural and performative value, and may very well be changing identities or ideas for the individuals with whom he works, Pocha Nostra does not seek to provide practical, localized solutions to public problems. Therefore, although Gómez Peña and his fellow performers may be activists in the sense that they are working aesthetically to subvert interpretations of power

structures, they are not working æfficatively—to borrow Duncombe's term—to alter the reality of those power structures for those who experience them.

Born in Mexico City, Guillermo Gómez Peña is an interdisciplinary cultural artist who has spent over thirty years engaging with the art and politics of boundaries. As Jen Saffron writes in the introduction to her 2011 interview with the artist, Gómez Peña is "a MacArthur Foundation Fellow and performer, teacher, and collaborator" and "a founding member and director of the radical performance troupe La Pocha Nostra, whose fierce works and stylized dissent create a deliberate, active space of pedagogy and performance designed to confront personal and political identities" (Saffron). Throughout his career, Gómez Peña has worked in and around the Mexico border region, challenging cultural and political norms through performance. He has engaged in both site-specific and more globally-oriented performances and projects, and currently lives in San Francisco (Saffron). Gómez Peña's entry in the *Encyclopedia of Mexico: History, Society, & Culture* states that he has developed three approaches in his work to dismantle cultural and political boundaries: performance as intercultural intervention, performance diplomacy, and cross-cultural/interdisciplinary collaboration with artists of different backgrounds (Bright). La Pocha Nostra works across all three categories to use performance as a tool to draw attention to and challenge traditional boundaries, whether between cultures, disciplines, or people. La Pocha Nostra is part of New York University's Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics, whose website describes the organization as providing a centralized base for "a loose network of rebel artists from various disciplines, generations, and ethnic backgrounds, whose common denominator is the desire to cross and erase dangerous borders between art and politics, practice and theory, artist and spectator" ("Guillermo Gómez Peña & La Pocha Nostra").

Although there is little academic literature about most Mexican artistic activist projects, scholars have written prolifically on Pocha Nostra, primarily analyzing the group's work in terms of performance activism. However, academics tend to gloss over the actual effects of Pocha Nostra's work. The Hemispheric Institute writes that the organization's "collaborative model functions both as an act of citizen diplomacy and as a means to create 'ephemeral communities'" and states that the collaborations are centered around "an ideal: 'If we learn to cross borders on stage, we may learn how to do so in larger social spheres.'" This is a lofty goal, but one difficult to measure in terms of impact. La Pocha Nostra's website says that the organization's work has been "in the hybrid realm of performance art" and that their "main emphasis has been the creation of intercultural, cross-border collaborations with performance artists from many countries" ("What is Pocha?"). La Pocha Nostra is about interconnectivity, cultural performance, and art, but, I assert, it is not really about immediate activism. Although Gómez Peña and Pocha Nostra are creating radical and important works of art, their goal is not to produce practical, sustained, community change, but rather to change broader perceptions of culture and identity. This is not to cast a value judgment on the purpose of his work, but rather to point out that it is a goal of art, not of activism. As theorist Stephen Duncombe would say, Gómez Peña is working to produce affect, not effect.

Referring back to the four characteristics that define pragmatic creative interventions, it is important to note the places where La Pocha Nostra falls short. The organization is collaborative in nature, but the collaborations are occurring across only one group of people: artists. They are international but not participatory in the sense that they actively involve individuals from all levels of society. Although workshops and performances increasingly involve young, untrained artists and audience members, the project is still firmly embedded in the art world. Additionally,

Pocha Nostra and most of Gómez Peña's work is far from localized. This is not to say that it should be; Gómez Peña's goal is to cross international boundaries and facilitate cross-cultural collaborations, and therefore does not aim to be local but rather global in nature. However, this limits the effectiveness of his project as a tool for concrete change. The fact that the artist currently resides in San Francisco is important, as it signals his intention to be involved in part of a broader, international community, not to participate in developing a certain city or local community. As far as social engagement, Pocha Nostra certainly takes a creative approach, but the issue of accountability presents a problem. The group is performing art to perform art, and is largely unconcerned with the effects of their work. Although they aim to facilitate long-lasting dialogues in the communities they work in, these are seen as a positive externality, not a fundamental goal. And lastly, although the international popularity of Gómez Peña's work is clear, there is no evidence that his broader goals have been met. This is not a criticism but rather a clarification. Gómez Peña's goal as an artist is to gradually reshape public perceptions and opinions. These may then change everyday reality for Mexican and U.S. citizens, but the artist's purpose is not to alter the political and economic realities of individual citizens. If it were, Pocha Nostra's work would look very different.

My reading of the work of Gómez Peña and La Pocha Nostra serves to point out that there are plenty of examples where so-called "activist art" does not constitute a pragmatic creative intervention. Combining art and activism doesn't necessarily result in successful, socially-engaged art projects. Sometimes it just produces different kinds of art. However, Mexico does offer many lesser-known examples in which a creative approach has been applied practically to specific public problems. In the environmental arena, artists Liliana Riva Palacio and Enrique Lomnitz created a traveling laboratory that brings art and environmental technology

to rural areas in Mexico. The bus goes from community to community to work with local

leaders, educating the community about resource conservation and energy efficiency. Their

approach is to not only provide technology and art, but to form lasting relationships with

community leaders so that the innovations they leave behind will be sustained (Blanco Martin).

In Mexico City, a team of comedians known as the Supercívicos is using public shaming and

social media to highlight crime and corruption. In an approach similar to that of Antanas

Mockus' mimes in Bogotá, the Supercívicos team uses humor and mimicry to draw attention to

everything from illegal parking to potholes. Posting videos on social media to gain a larger

audience, the Supercívicos, led by Arturo Hernández, film themselves during public

performances that illustrate a specific issue being ignore by authorities. In one episode, they

place fake spiders all over an illegally parked water truck, and in another, they publicly taunt

citizens who are sitting in reserved disabled seating on public buses. Hundreds of thousands of

people watch these videos. Hernández says that in a country where authorities don't fairly

monitor bad behavior, "If you experience the small trauma of being exposed and shamed, it is

very unlikely you will break the same rule twice" (Ahmed and Villegas). Citizens have started

calling in to Supercívicos to report complaints that go unanswered by the police or other

officials, and the comedy team has become a city-wide force for fighting low-level corruption.

One of the best examples of Mexico's creative interventions takes place in the city of

Tijuana. Situated directly across the border from San Diego, California, Tijuana forms part of the

largest binational U.S.-Mexico urban region, and is an important cultural and economic center.

The city was once the home base of the Tijuana drug cartel, which has since been taken over by

the Sinaloa cartel. Issues of drug trafficking and related violence have long plagued the city.

Although in recent years the city center has become a hub for the arts, food, and culture, many of the city's outskirts continue to struggle with poverty and crime (Zeiger, 140).

Camino Verde is a 40,000-person neighborhood on the southern outskirts of Tijuana, which architecture critic Mimi Zeiger writes has been "largely immune to any revitalization" that has occurred in other parts of the city (140). It is here that Mexican architect Raul Cárdenas Osuna founded *Torolab* in 1995. Torolab is a small artists' collective that aims to foster artistic initiatives that combat poverty and violence with education and culture. As Cárdenas Osuna puts it, the project uses "'social worker strategies to foster creativity that builds economies'" (Zeiger, 140). Zeiger writes that the group started out with proposals for architectural buildings, but now focuses on fostering programming ideas that address specific public problems. The organization has sponsored projects that have designed a pair of pants specifically for border-crossers, started organic farms for immigrants, and created furniture out of the overwhelming quantities of trash in Mexico City (Leitner). All of these initiatives aim to take a creative, practical approach to a pressing community issue.

Torolab's most recent project is one of its most ambitious and well-known interventions. La Granja Transfronteriza (The Transborder Farm) is a bunker-like concrete structure built on what used to be land controlled by gangs, and houses Torolab's FarmLab program (Zeiger, 140). Writing for the *Christian Science Monitor*, Whitney Eulich writes that FarmLab was founded in 2010, as drug violence in Tijuana exploded and Camino Verde became known as one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in the city. La Granja contains classrooms, a kitchen, and a computer lab, and there is a community garden outside. But FarmLab went beyond building a community center; it used La Granja as the starting point for a variety of programs aimed at breaking the cycle of poverty in Camino Verde. Eulich writes, "On weekday afternoons, the bunker is

bustling with young kids screeching out notes on their violins under the guidance of

instructors… Families father on the weekend to grow vegetables... A basic kitchen techniques

course is taught Tijuana's renowned Culinary Arts School." Raul Cárdenas Osuna and his team

at ToroLab designed not only a building, but a comprehensive plan for transforming the

community of Camino Verde, from the bottom up. The La Granja building helps citizens reclaim

physical space in the city, artistic and creative programs address issues of cultural development,

and practical education and farming resources help resolve problems of food insecurity and lack

of education.

Unlike broad government initiatives aimed at transforming entire regions or cities with

one project, FarmLab alters the daily lives of one community, in a variety of ways. The initiative

receives funding from the Mexican government's Secretariat of Social Development, and has

won a variety of prizes including an award developed by the Mexican government in conjunction

with the Harvard Cultural Agents initiative, which concluded that the project had the potential to

change neighborhoods worldwide. More importantly, he has gotten citizens involved in changing

the community that they live in, first by convincing them that it was possible, and then by

encouraging residents to participate in change processes. Since 2010, violence in Camino Verde

has plunged 85% according to ToroLab staff (Eulich). Although overall crime in Tijuana has

also fallen over that time, Camino Verde has seen a much larger decrease in violence, implying

that quite a bit of credit is due to improvements in the immediate community. Cárdenas Osuna

connects the success of the FarmLab project to Tijuana's historic connection with art as a social

tool, but also emphasizes the importance of coordination from the grassroots all the way up to

the federal government. As quoted in an article for the *Harvard Political Review*, he says, "There

is a history in Tijuana to be said about protest art and which is super important… But it comes up

to a point when it is maybe enough…So I guess in our generation we started to do something with all this wonderful, incredible history of protest art" (Leitner). Cárdenas Osuna describes La Granja as a "knowledge farm", a place where, as reporter Whitney Eulich writes, community members are not only learning but also "contributing their own talents for the improvement of the neighborhood."

Although little scholarly work has been written about ToroLab or La Granja, I propose that Cárdenas Osuna's initiatives offer a model for how individual actors can transform entire communities. Cárdenas Osuna grew up in Mazatlán, Mexico, the son of an architectural illustrator (Zeiger, 143). He moved to Tijuana to study architecture in college, and began his career in the field of architectural art. His early projects, including those with ToroLab, were architectural or structural designs reflected social problems but did little to solve them (Eulich). He quickly realized how distant his ideas were from the people who inspired them. Discussing a 2005 installation that imagined a re-designed housing project, he says, "Design was not answering the question. Our previous way of working was symbolic, but we are moving toward the pragmatic" (Zeiger, 143). This emphasis on the pragmatic is what distinguishes projects such as ToroLab from projects like Pocha Nostra. Cárdenas Osuna is working to produce what Stephen Duncombe calls *æffect*, and that necessitates a different approach to both art and activism.

When he met with other leaders in 2010 to address how to solve the issue of violence in Tijuana, Cárdenas Osuna took a different approach. He mapped violence, nutrition deficits, and imprisonment around the city, and found that these issues were disproportionately present in Camino Verde. He then went knocking on doors to ask what the neighborhood needed. This technique was uncommon and initially viewed with skepticism, but it worked. Cárdenas Osuna

received detailed information about the specific nature of these issues in Camino Verde, discovering, for example, that the old canal that runs through the neighborhood was serving as a border for rival gangs. The leaders were then able to request funding and build parks over the canal to reduce violence in that area (Eulich). Cárdenas Osuna's person-to-person approach not only allowed for more detailed, site-specific information, but also contributed to his goal of empowering residents. Whitney Eulich writes that Alma Teresa Carillo was one of the residents who talked to Cárdenas Osuna during the surveys, and although she was initially skeptical, she decided to attend a writing class at La Granja. And then, she says, "'I started to realize something. They're asking what we need. They are telling us what we need. Something was happening" (Eulich). Carillo is now an advocate for the work done at La Granja, and works to get others in the community involved. As support grows, FarmLab is working to become self-sustaining, using proceeds from artworks and cultural initiatives to fund classes and outreach. The work done by the FarmLab in Camino Verde is an invaluable example of how localized, small-scale pragmatic creative interventions can be incredibly effective, perhaps even more so than more expansive projects.

Individual art initiatives are often overlooked due to their localized nature, but the examples above demonstrate that both academics and authorities should be wary of underestimating these types of projects. I argue that a main component of the pragmatic creative initiatives I describe is that they are specifically tailored to the communities and societies they serve. This means that any one project cannot, in fact, be directly replicated anywhere else with any hope of success. These initiatives work precisely because they are *not* scalable, and do not aim to be. What is scalable however, is the approach. Continuing to use Mexico as an example, the next part of this chapter shows how governments, organizations, and even individuals can

encourage others to take creative approaches to solving social, economic, and political issues within their own communities. I explain how governments and arts organizations can empower individuals to use their personal experience and talents to produce small-scale initiatives that address problems on a local level. This is particularly relevant when discussing how PCIs can achieve success in rural areas or small communities, which lack the people and funding to produce the kinds of innovations found in cities.

The 2013 United Nations Creative Economy Report reaffirms the importance of the "local creative field as a driver of development" (35). The report's subtitle, "Widening Local Development Pathways" is a clear indicator of UN's focus on development not at the national level but rather in cities and regions. However, the report also notes that local and national authorities do not exist independently, and therefore "Successful policies will generally emerge from synergies between these two levels of government, as well as how they interact and cooperate with the private sector and civil society" (35). While the Mexican government might want to tackle some of the problems listed above, it currently lacks both the capacity and the funding to address the wide variety of issues around the country. Plagued by a drug war, fluctuating relations with the United States, and widespread corruption, it is unlikely that the federal government could initiate any large-scale creative programs. However, Mexican actors such as the ones I discuss have shown that often, individuals can become cultural agents within their own communities. This makes interventions easier to implement as well as more likely to be successful, because actors are invested in the projects that affect their own community. This does not mean the government cannot be involved. Recognizing the activism among their own citizens, the Mexican government has started providing opportunities and incentives for artistic activists.

The opportunities for inspiring art activism are as varied as the field of art activism itself.

Doris Sommer refers to a process of "agent spotting," in which an individual or group is "a

curator and facilitator who exercises good judgment on other people's bright ideas" (104-105).

This, she says, is what *Palas por Pistolas* creator Pedro Reyes was doing when he came up with

the *Atlas de intervenciones (Atlas of Interventions)*. The *Atlas* is a brochure the size of a poster,

in which Reyes gathered examples of creative interventions. The brochure included descriptions

and drawings of socially-engaged projects from Mexico City, and Reyes gave the brochure to the

city government so that it could make its way into schools in order to inspire students to start

thinking about what they could do for their own communities (105). Reyes' website lists an

extension of this project, called the *Atlas for Civic Innovation*, which is a travelling exhibit that

contains one hundred signs. Each sign describes "the operation of an exemplary initiative, which

was selected for its inventiveness and effectiveness to face a social, economic, cultural or

environmental challenge" (Reyes, "Atlas for Civic Innovation"). These signs are meant not only

to introduce viewers to the opportunities offered by cultural innovation, but also to instruct them

on how to engage in their own projects. Each sign includes detailed diagrams and instructions on

the project's process and performance, providing a template for those who want to know how it's

done. Therefore, a student or citizen admiring a project receives a guide for how to produce this

kind of project on their own. The Mexican government went on to build on Reyes' work, and

CONACULTA, the Mexican Ministry of Culture, has now joined forces with Harvard's Cultural

Agents Initiative to reward successful cultural agents. Each year, the Ministry awards an annual

prize for "the best artistic intervention in a particularly difficult city" (Sommer, 105). One of the first winners was Raul Cárdenas Osuna's ToroLab.[41]

These projects inspire citizens, as well as give them the tools to become the next Pedro Reyes, or the next team of Supercívicos. The scalability of pragmatic creative interventions comes not from individual projects themselves, but from the approach. Actors looking to stimulate these kinds of projects in their own neighborhoods, cities, or countries can either bring creative interventions into their own work, or initiate programs that help mold active citizens. These individuals can then identify specific issues in their own communities, and use their localized knowledge and creativity to formulate better solutions than a government or organization may be able to offer. The advent of the internet and social media has contributed to the efficiency of this process. As shown by the popularity of the Supercívicos on YouTube, and the increased use of Twitter to call out Mexican politicians, new digital platforms are making activism more accessible than ever before.[42] Art is a useful tool for activism precisely because it can move easily over geographical boundaries, and technology has further increased the mobility of creative ideas.

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[41] Even before Reyes and the Harvard Cultural Agents Initiative, CONACULTA was working to promote artistic interventions. In 1992, CONACULTA collaborated with a U.S.-based nonprofit called Installation to found an exhibition series called *inSITE*. *inSITE* is a "anti-biennial" art festival that provides the resources and funding for a series of installation art works that take place in different sites along the border. The festival is not designed to benefit tourists or art enthusiasts but rather the communities in which the art pieces are built. Performance scholar Jennie Klein writes that the 2005 *inSITE* event, titled *Interventions and Scenarios*, "provides a model for engaged activist art in a post-global, cyber-culture society" (31). Projects at this festival included a solar-powered machine for cleaning water, and colorful carts designed for transporting cheap goods bought in Tijuana across the border (Klein, 31-35).

[42] A 2015 article in *The Economist* described how new NGOs are using social media to fight corruption and inactivity within the government. These organizations call out corrupt acts, encourage authorities to release important documents and information, and to pressure politicians to keep their promises to the electorate ("Mexico and its NGOS: The New Movers and Shakers").

In this chapter, I have argued that in many situations, individuals are well suited to engage in the kinds of art projects that produce sustainable, community-driven development. Raul Cárdenas Osuna and other Mexican art activists demonstrate that although art activism does not always produce pragmatic creative interventions, it often does. The historic presence of art in Mexican national identity makes it uniquely receptive to these kinds of interventions, and the government and other organizations begin to recognize this unique national asset. Various groups have found ways to inspire and instruct everyday citizens, motivating them to think creatively about how they can transform their own communities. The examples from Mexico show that in the field of development, scale and replicability are two very different things. Small, individually directed, local projects derive their potential from the fact that they respond to specific socioeconomic, cultural, and historical conditions, and thus are not designed to be replicable. However, governments and organizations can still 'scale-up' these interventions by providing them as models for other citizens and communities. Cárdenas Osuna, the Supercívicos, and other Mexican art activists show that when artists take it upon themselves to carefully examine public problems, and involve the community in creative solutions to those problems, they can become formidable agents of change. I argue that we need to reconsider what Duncombe calls the *æffectiveness* of art activism, because in many situations, individual action may be the key to practical, successful, and sustainable local development.

Conclusion

Academia, Accountability, and Action

Pragmatic creative interventions are prolific in Latin America. In this thesis, I have identified and analyzed only a few of the seemingly infinite projects that exist in the region, and haven't even touched on those that take place in other parts of the world. My goal was not to perform a comprehensive survey of these projects, but rather to identify the characteristics of pragmatic creative interventions, and to demonstrate how these types of projects can work on both the macro and micro levels to produce concrete change. In many ways, the three case studies I examined serve to question and contest the lack of interdisciplinary analysis in many academic fields. Development issues are never one-sided, and yet the majority of the projects I included, if discussed at all in academic literature, have been studied in relation to one specific subject. Previous studies of the Chilean *arpillera* movement focused heavily on the artistic product, or the politicization of women through workshops, but lacked an analysis of the economic factors that made the artistic product and the political transformation possible. Studies about the transformation of Medellín have thoroughly addressed the policies of social urbanism and infrastructural development, but didn't describe how those physical changes led to changes in citizen's daily lives. Scholars acknowledge Mexico's expansive cultural history but have yet to acknowledge how a new generation of artists is using that history to take community issues into their own hands.

This is not to say that previous academic work does not provide a valuable foundation for research. As I have shown, there is a vast array of theoretical literature that, taken together, can provide useful angles for reframing the problems faced by developing communities. However, today's world demands that we reconnect academic theory with the real world, and that can only

be done through an interdisciplinary approach. I have argued that pragmatic creative interventions are important to economic, political, and social development, and I also assert that they are worthy of academic attention. If this kind of research aims to expand into a broader field of study, it is necessary to address the issue of accountability. Identifying examples and outlining common characteristics, as I have done with this paper, is the first step towards elaborating a new approach to development. However, any formal theory of pragmatic creative interventions would need not only a model for the creation of these projects but also a model for their evaluation. In other words, we need a way to know whether individual projects work. Thus far, I have defined success very broadly partially because it is a highly subjective term, and partially because, in the context of the projects I examine, it is incredibly hard to measure empirically. But I want to emphasize that this does not mean a formal framework should be avoided. In order to outline one possibility for this type of framework, I return to Stephen Duncombe's theory of æfficacy.

In his article "Does it Work? The Æffect of Activist Art", Duncombe argues that "the artist who hopes to bring about social, economic, or political change through art must address questions about its impact" (117). His statement is specifically concerned with activist art, but I propose that this assertion can be extended to those organizations and individuals that engage in any type of creative intervention that aims to change an unacceptable reality. Duncombe's essay centers around the idea that if artistic activism is to be taken seriously, artists need to confront the issue of metrics. For many artists, and, I argue, for many activists, measurement of outcome is not only difficult but often distasteful, because it means acknowledging the possibility of bad art, or bad activism. As Duncombe writes, "When we raise questions about what works, and how we know, we are confronted by the activist artist's worst fear: that maybe what we are doing

doesn't really work" (131). But the possibility and reality of failure is what leads to improvement; without accountability, activist art is simply a reflection of good intentions, not a force for change. Similarly, the pragmatism that I argue is essential for the success of creative interventions cannot exist without accountability. A large part of pragmatics involves evaluating actions to determine whether they are successful, and if they are not, trying something new. If artists, activists, and academics want creative development to live up to its potential, ignoring accountability measures is not an option.

Duncombe argues that various forms of metrics already exist in the worlds of art and art activism, although artists are often quick to dismiss them. The reality of the modern world is that art has an economic value just like any other product: art works are bought and sold, often for large sums of money, and success is judged by art critics, museum curators, and collectors. Activist art, often funded by non-profit organizations, governments, or festivals, is already judged by those who decide how to allocate funding (Duncombe, 130). The question, Duncombe writes, is not whether metrics exist but rather which ones should be used, and how. To this end, he develops a method for judging what he calls the *æfficacy*[43] of activist art projects. Through research and surveys Duncombe identifies a variety of possible intentions of activist art, goals that creators may be trying to achieve. These can include inviting participation, transforming an environment, building community, or providing utility, to name a few (121-123). He then divides these goals into four categories, based on their orientation towards cultural vs. material impact, and their time frame, which is either imminent (short-term) or ultimate (long-term). Many creative interventions fit into more than one of these categories, but they are useful for thinking about the different types of changes that project attempt to achieve. For example, the goals of the

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[43] For a more detailed explanation of the idea of *æfficacy*, see Chapter 4.

Chilean *arpillera* movement fell into multiple categories: the organizers of the workshop aimed for imminent material impact in creating of much-needed jobs, but they also, and possibly unintentionally, produced ultimate cultural change in resituating the role of women in the country's political and social systems.

After identifying an artist's or project's goals, the next step is finding a way to measure how well those goals were met. This is the issue of accountability. Duncombe proceeds to outline a theoretical formula for the evaluation of specific projects. Highlighting the fact that activist art often produces more æffects than the ones that were intended, Duncombe uses a mathematical sum to demonstrate how artists can measure the success of a project. His formula looks like this:

$$S_x = \frac{1}{x} \sum_{i=1}^{x} \frac{\Delta ai}{\Delta di} + S_y$$

Sx represents the success of x numbers of different goals, which, if they could be empirically measured, could be evaluated based on the change in achieved impact divided by the change in desired impact for each goal. Sy represents the unintended consequences of the project that was put into place, and accounts for any impact that occurred outside of what was intended (Duncombe, 126-128). It is important to note that this formula is not universably applicable, nor even practical for the majority of activist art projects. This system would work for measuring, for example, how well a poster campaign raised attendance at town-hall meetings, but it the number of factors involved in say, reducing violence in the city of Medellín, would make it entirely useless for evaluating the impact of the Medellín poetry festival. Duncombe makes it clear that this model is mostly a metaphor: an oversimplified example of one way in which we might use empirical methods to seriously evaluate the impact of activist art (127).

Duncombe's process of evaluation offers one approach towards addressing the accountability of pragmatic creative interventions, one way of answering the question: how do we know if they work? His formulas are not meant to be practical, but rather to emphasize the need for practicality. A true theory capable of predicting the impact of creative projects would be incredibly complex, but not impossible. It would require significant research, quantitative analysis in the vein of econometric analysis, and an interdisciplinary approach. Although far beyond my own abilities, I believe a quantitative attempt at measuring the impact of some of the projects I have discussed would be a worthwhile effort. For now, however, I consider it sufficient to echo Duncombe when he asserts that "thinking and planning about affect and effect, intent and measurement," is important "not because one can predict exactly what will happen, but so we can make sure that *something* happens, and then, once we've determined what has happened, *refocus* our efforts" (129-130).[44] In other words, measurement is essential for accountability, and accountability, in turn, is essential to producing impact.

Although I have highlighted projects that I judge to have produced impact in Latin America, my research has implications for the rest of the world as well. Traditional approaches to development have left many behind, not only in the global south, but also here in the United States and in much of the Western world. One of the unique strengths of pragmatic creative interventions is that they can address the problems faced by small, specific communities, and therefore can be employed by groups who remain at the peripheries of economic and political progress. The adaptability of the pragmatic creative approach means that it can be employed by anyone, from any background, in practically any situation. Many researchers are starting to explore and promote the potential of creative projects in a variety of situations. Sommer and the

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[44] Emphasis is the author's.

Harvard Cultural Agent's initiative guides and supports small actors who make a big difference. As evidenced by their 2013 report, the United Nation's Development Program is increasingly supportive of local initiatives that use cultural assets as economic and political resources. And Stephen Duncombe, the scholar-activist advocating for accountability and æfficacy, co-directs the Center for Artistic Activism, which provides inspiration, education, and training for creative activists.[45] Duncombe has also created "Actipedia", a user-generated website that collects examples of creative activism from all over the world.

The possibilities for pragmatic creative interventions are seemingly endless, and my research has led me to uncover projects that go beyond what I can even imagine. Claus Meyer, a Danish entrepreneur and world-famous culinarian, is reimagining Bolivian cuisine at a world-class restaurant called Gustu in La Paz, providing jobs and training for residents in the process (Kormann). American artist Caledonia Curry, known as Swoon, has created a variety of structural art pieces that have turned into larger, sustainable projects, including a shelter in Haiti and a musical shantytown in New Orleans (Ryzik). In the long run, some of these initiatives will be successful, and many more will fail. What I have argued, however, is that all of them merit further study. The intersection between cultural and economic capital is not one that we can afford to ignore any longer. Through theoretical research as well as through the examination of projects in Chile, Colombia, and Mexico, I have made a case for the pressing need for a new, interdisciplinary perspective in the field of development. The pragmatic creative interventions I have examined in this paper challenge traditional academic classifications and categories. In-depth analyses of how they emerge and evolve are essential to understanding the interactions

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[45] According to the website, the mission of the Center is as follows: "The Center for Artistic Activism is a place to explore, analyze, and strengthen connections between social activism and artistic practice. Creative activism is more than just an innovative tactic, it is an entire approach: a perspective, a practice, a philosophy. Our goal is to make more creative activists and more effective artists. We aim to win." (artisticactivism.org/about/).

between culture, creativity, and more traditional measures of quality of life. The United Nations,

Sommer, Duncombe, and the many other theorists I have discussed all have unique and

important perspectives about the same types of things. What we need, however, is a framework

that allows them to start to interact, to realize that they are all discussing the same thing. In this

thesis, I have explored what such a framework might look like, and have illuminated the ways in

which an artistic approach can be used to jumpstart problem-solving on a wide variety of social,

economic, and political issues. In doing so, I hope that I have inspired readers to reconsider the

way they think about local problems as well as the broad issues we face as a global community.

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