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Latino/Latin American Muralism and Social Change: A Reflection on the Social Significance of the Cold Spring Mural

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Latino/Latin American Muralism and Social Change

A Reflection on the Social Significance of the Cold Spring Mural

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for All College Honors and Distinction
in the Departments of Art and Hispanic Studies

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Latino/Latin American Muralism and Social Change

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A Reflection on the Social Significance of the Cold Spring Mural

“El arte en sí es una realidad social... Y si no quiere traicionar su función social, el arte debe mostrar el mundo como transformable y ayudar a cambiarlo”

~Ernst Fischer (Belkin 107)

Modern muralism is strongly linked to Latino/Latin American culture. When many people think of murals, they first imagine Diego Rivera and the Mexican Mural Renaissance (1920s – 1940s). This Mural Renaissance (Mexican School) came about in response to the social upheaval and reforms of the Mexican Revolution from 1910 - 1920. Although it is widely believed that Diego Rivera’s murals had provocative social and political ramifications during this time of Mexican reconstruction, in reality many fell short from furthering the social change they supposedly promoted. Nevertheless, the Mexican School has been a source of inspiration for several other mural movements in the Americas during the twentieth century. These movements include a wide variety of murals: from the government-commissioned to the anti-establishment, from the monumental to the ephemeral, from the individual artist to the collaborative team. The type of mural created develops out of a specific social context, which is in turn altered by the mural itself. The effectiveness of a mural in promoting social change depends on how well the process of making it harmonizes with its social context.

1 “Art in itself is a social reality... And if it doesn’t want to betray its social function, art should portray the world as transformable and help to change it” (translated by the author)
The inspiration for this project came from my study abroad experience in Chile in 2010. My love for Chile’s murals led me to develop a semester-long research project on protest art during the Pinochet dictatorship, which familiarized me with Chilean art-action collectives and brigade-style muralism. Besides its social urgency, what also interested me about the Chilean protest art I studied was its collaborative nature. Soon after I arrived back home to Minnesota, in January of 2011, I began to plan how I could bring my experience of Chile’s public art to the States. In the spring and summer of that year, I organized a collaborative community mural in Cold Spring, MN in partnership with Mayuli Bales, director of Casa Guadalupe Multicultural Community, an organization that serves Latinos in the Cold Spring area.

Because the vast majority of the Latino population in Cold Spring is of Mexican heritage (77% according to the U.S. Census Bureau), I was motivated to learn more about the great tradition of Mexican muralism. It made sense for me to study Chicano muralism in the United States as well, as the Cold Spring mural in Minnesota would take place in a similar cultural context. The rich artistic history of the prestigious Mexican School and the process behind Chicano community murals both provide points of contrast and comparison to the Chilean-style brigade murals. As part of my research I also met with Mexican-born, Minneapolis-based muralist Gustavo Lira, who has given me yet another, more local, perspective with his experience organizing community murals in Minnesota.

This paper is not meant to be a comprehensive study of muralism in the Americas. Rather, it takes a look at different types of murals and mural practice and analyzes their effectiveness in instigating positive social change in their respective social contexts. My research for this paper comes from readings, personal interviews, and first-hand experience. It informed the process I took in organizing the Cold Spring Mural, and, as I reflect on that process now, has also given me insights for critically analyzing the social appropriateness of the style of muralism I employed in the context of Cold Spring.

The societal effects of muralism depend on the mural’s aesthetic and process, which in turn are motivated by the original social context. Thus, certain mural
styles are more effective for certain social contexts. Despite variations in social context, murals are generally most socially effective when they increase community members’ sense of efficacy by involving them in the process of design brainstorming and painting. To create sustainable change, a mural must be part of a larger social movement that continues after painting has been finished.

**DEFINING SOCIAL CHANGE**

The term, “social change,” is very ambiguous and difficult to define; nevertheless, several sociologists throughout the years have attempted to do so. One such sociologist is Everett M. Rogers, who in 1971 defined social change as “the process by which alteration occurs in the structure and function of a social system” (Rogers 768). According to Rogers, social change takes place through human communication, which spreads new ideas. Ideally, these new ideas will inspire behavioral changes in those that receive them (Rogers 768-769). These behavioral changes, when they take place in “a social system,” are what cause social change to occur (Rogers 769).

The communication necessary to bring about social change is brought about through the organizing of social movements. Sociologist Alberto Melucci defines a social movement as an action that is comprised of: “group solidarity, definition of a conflict, and ‘a breach of compatibility of the system within which the action takes place”’ (Touraine 764). “Group solidarity” is defined by a collective identity among members of a movement (New Social, 10). Recently, identity has become more and more recognized as a motivating factor for the creation of “new social movements” (NSMs), a phenomenon first described by sociologists in the 1970s (New Social, 10). Collective identity is best formed through the process of dialogic communication, a concept influenced by symbolic interactionist theory: meaning is created through interactions with other human beings (New Social, 17). Dialogic communication, as opposed to top-down communication, “involves a mutually transformative exchange of views,” so that meaning (in this case a collective identity) is created organically instead of dictatorially (Jacobson, 93).
Over the course of Latino/Latin American history in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, murals have been an instrumental part of social movements; mural production has helped to build “group solidarity,” to define social conflicts, and to rebel against the current social system. It must also be acknowledged that social movements, and the change for which they advocate, can be positive or negative. For example, Hitler created the social movement known as the Nazis, which used mural propaganda to create very destructive social changes. For the purposes of this paper, I am interested in how murals contribute to positive social change, or social progress.

Sociologist Alain Touraine gives several examples of positive “new social movements” that have occurred globally since 1975: “youth protest, the women’s movement, the ecological campaign, the peace movement, and the defense of ethnic-national or religious identity” (Touraine 764). Similarly, social movements in Latin America have fought for cultural and political autonomy, grassroots democracy, and a push towards economic equality, racial/cultural integration, and women’s empowerment.

Latin America has had a long history of struggle to wrest its cultural and political autonomy from the United States. In 1822, United States President Monroe declared that the Americas were “henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers… it is impossible that the allied powers should extend their political system to any portion of [the continent] without endangering our peace and happiness” (President Monroe, qtd. in González, 38-39). This Monroe Doctrine was to protect U.S. financial interests, as many U.S. companies had invested large amounts of money in Latin America’s banana republics. When the United States felt economically threatened, it engaged military intervention. One such military intervention, the Spanish-American war, ended with the Treaty of Paris in 1898 that gave the United States “direct control” of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Phillipines (González 57). The war’s end brought even more U.S. companies to Latin America; by 1899, the United Fruit Company was formed, becoming the quintessential example of U.S. imperialism (González 57). In the case of Chile, the ITT (International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation – founded in
1920), another U.S. multinational company, also became a powerful imperialist influence ("ITT World Communications Inc.").

U.S. multinational companies’ economic concerns have also led to other covert interventions in Latin American politics during the twentieth century, which have supported several of the region’s severely repressive dictatorships. Latin Americans fought to liberate themselves from these regimes and establish democracy. During times of democracy, Latin American countries have striven to maintain their own cultural autonomy in light of the bombardment of references to U.S. mass media and commercial advertising.

United States imperialism has not been the only obstacle to social progress in Latin America. Marginalized groups have also struggled for cultural and political autonomy from their own countries’ cultural and political domination. Similarly, Latinos in the U.S. have also struggled to protect their cultural and political autonomy from being extinguished. In times of relative peace, Latinos’/Latin Americans’ struggle for a more complete democracy has been more fully developed through their fight for economic equality, racial/cultural integration, and women’s empowerment in their respective societies. Murals have played an integral role in these fights for social justice.

**DEFINING A MURAL**

The traditional definition of a mural is a monumental, two-dimensional art form that is designed for display on a specific wall. It is often painted or constructed with mosaic tiles, in such a way that the mural and the wall become inseparable. The mural art form is very dependent on the wall - indeed, the word, *mural*, is defined in Spanish as “belonging or relating to a wall” (translated by the author, *Real Academia Española*). *Mural* is derived from the Latin word *murus*, meaning *wall* (Cawley).

Despite the strong connection that the mural has with the wall, simply placing something on a wall does not necessarily make it a mural. Graffiti, for example, is often a point of contention. Juan ‘Chin Chin’ Tralma, co-founder of the Chilean mural brigade, the Brigada Ramona Parra (BRP), shared with me that in his
opinion, graffiti does not constitute a mural, because while it conveys a message, it lacks an image (Tralma, Personal Interview). Graffiti is not entirely without merit in this discussion, however; as will be seen it was essential to the development of Chilean muralism. Some may also argue that when graffiti letters may become murals if they are aesthetically integrated into an artistic composition and quasi-image.

By Chin Chin's logic, it can be assumed that painting a wall a solid color is also not a mural, as there is no image. However, a wall-mounted poster, though it may contain imagery, is not a mural because the wall was not integral to the design. Furthermore, a small poster may be easily reproduced, lacking the uniqueness and monumentality inherent in a mural. Monumentality is not everything, either - the grand scale of a billboard does not make it a mural. Instead of integrating itself, as a mural does, into the historical walls of space, the billboard imposes its pseudo-wall onto public space without care for context. It is a product of commercial advertising and the mass media that is the antithesis of muralism.

According to great Mexican muralist José Clemente Orozco, “The highest, the most logical, the purest and strongest form of painting is the mural. In this form alone, it is one with the other arts – with all the others” (Patterson 206). I interpret this to mean that a mural touches all dimensions of art, breaking with the limited definition described above. Artists have played with the mural’s definition by incorporating the third dimension through sculptural elements: Gustavo Lira’s maestro José Luis Soto, for example, created a mosaic mural in Michoacán, Mexico that included a relief sculpture of an eagle’s head projecting above the roofline. Artists have also experimented by: removing the mural from the wall; emphasizing the wall and the space that the mural inhabits; and focusing on the performative aspect of creating a mural.

Mexican School muralists experimented with the portable fresco. While made with the same materials used in a permanent wall fresco, the portable fresco is smaller and not directly attached to a standing wall. Diego Rivera, another of the three great muralists during the Mexican Mural Renaissance, was disappointed with the portable fresco because it did not have the monumentality that he desired, nor
did it have the canvas painting’s facility of transport (Indych-López 148). Thus, this early derivative of muralism never proved very successful.

A more portable form of muralism is the manta. The manta is a large piece of fabric that is painted as a mural. It can be hung for display at community events or even carried in a public demonstration, depending on its size. For example, the Colectivo BRP, a group that evolved from Chile’s BRP, recently painted a manta that hung at non-profit organization Un Techo Para Chile’s (A Roof for Chile) concert fundraiser, Un Canto Para Chile (December 10, 2011, Figure 1). After the concert was over the manta was folded up and stored for later use. The benefits of mantas include: less bureaucratic red tape (because they are not painted permanently on private or public property), and more options for display – a manta can go almost anywhere. The downside of the manta’s portability is that it lacks a grounded sense of place; it does not make as powerful of a spatial impact as a more permanent mural painted directly on the wall.

Some murals may be compared to fourth-dimensional artwork such as installation: a spatially interactive, fourth-dimensional art form where the viewer becomes part of the piece over time. The grand scale and multidimensionality of space in some murals makes it impossible for the viewer to capture the entire story at once, but she may witness its slow unfolding as she moves around the artwork in the space. Artist David Alfaro Siqueiros was particularly fascinated by this idea of the viewer’s contribution to the mural’s animation. He takes viewer participation to the extreme in The March of Humanity on Earth and Toward the Cosmos (1971). The Siqueiros Cultural Polyforum building was designed especially to house this mural, forming an interior shaped like a “hemispherical faceted ellipse” to create the illusion of circular motion (Folgarait, So Far 93). The design engages sculptural relief (Folgarait, So Far, plates 17 and 22), and the floor even rotates to facilitate viewing of the mural.

Sometimes the process of mural production is the primary focus of the artwork. ASCO, a Chicano art action collective, emphasized the performative process of muralism as art in itself when they “performed” the role of the mural with their own bodies in the streets of East Los Angeles in the early 1970s (Signs from the
Heart, 47). Mural as performance is not limited to this kind of theatricality; it may be defined by the simple act of painting. Graffiti murals, for example, are often created with the expectation that they will be painted over by authorities. The act of defiance against the social system becomes more important than the image itself. CADA, a Chilean art-action collective during the Pinochet dictatorship, emphasized process through their interactive graffiti mural-making to foster community dialogue and generate anti-Pinochet activism. In such a collaborative, community-based process, viewers became active performers when they participated in the painting.

For the purposes of this paper, I am primarily interested in a mural as a two-dimensional artwork painted directly onto a pre-existing wall. Muralist and author Eva Cockcroft beautifully describes the mural as “painting wedded to architecture, public art conceived in a given space, art rooted in a specific human context” (Cockcroft, Weber, and Cockcroft xxiv). I am drawn to this kind of mural’s powerful immediacy achieved through its physical and conceptual integration into space. This immediacy is further enhanced by an interactive performance process among painters and community members, which creates the communication necessary for producing social change.

**EVALUATING THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF A MURAL**

As previously noted, muralism has often played a prominent role in the context of social movements. The analysis of social context is essential for understanding the social impact of a finished mural and its process. To determine ways that a mural could impact society, I examined scholars’ techniques for analyzing the social impact of public art.

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2 This process of making a mural will be referred to as *mural practice*. *Muralism*, then, is the combination of both a *mural* and its *mural practice*. The nature of each mural’s mark and practice is motivated by social context.
In his book, Political Protest and Street Art, Lyman G. Chaffee assesses the social effectiveness of street art as if it were its own artistic medium. By contrast, in my own analysis of social impact I extract muralism from other street media such as fliers and posters. This is no easy task, Chaffee admits. Because “...ideas are disseminated through a variety of means... This creates difficulty in evaluating the most influential factors over time” (Chaffee 25). Chaffee postulates that one cannot measure the social impact of a specific manifestation of street art (one mural, for example) – instead impact is measured by the trajectory of the social process created by multiple works, including other street media. I agree that in the process of a social movement, repetitive messages are often necessary to reach vast numbers of people. However, I feel that though it may be difficult, it is possible to interpret the social impact of one mural (or particular series of murals).

Although Chaffee mentions process, he is talking about the process of social change created by the final products of street art. I am also concerned with the social impact of a mural as a final product, but in addition, I want to explore the social value of mural practice - the mural making process - something Chaffee does not address.

Chaffee's book mentions several social factors, or “indicators,” as he calls them, that motivate street art: 1) to experience personal catharsis, an individual’s release of tension after an authoritarian regime, 2) to take advantage of the popular street culture that ensures widespread visibility of the message, 3) to celebrate a “cultural, ethnic-linguistic identity”, 4) to provide a voice for the marginalized to counter the mass media, 5) to influence the dominant media, 6) to promote an electoral campaign, 7) to publicize announcements or events, 8) to promote a grassroots image 9) to promote the state, 10) to show existence of underground resistance to repressive regimes, 11) to “psychopolitically” intimidate the opposition by controlling the “tone of the street,” 12) to mark territory/take control of space for a specific group, 13) to politically intimidate individuals (such as by posing death threats), 14) to promote a literacy campaign, 15) to combat commercial advertising, 16) to politically inspire and “generate morale” among the people (Chaffee 9-20).
In this list of motivations for political street-art, I found some points of intersection with my concept of social change. Several of Chaffee’s motivations, however, cannot be translated into indicators of the kind of social change I am looking for. A few of Chaffee’s indicators I will take nearly as they are, but many need some tweaking. I will also describe additional indicators lacking in Chaffee’s list. The result will be a new list of indicators for social impact, indicators that are intrinsically neutral – whether the social change enacted is positive or negative depends on the agenda behind the mural. In this paper I examine how these social powers of the mural can be harnessed for positive social change.

The “psychopolitical” (11) and intimidation (13) categories are irrelevant to my study of muralism, as they are divisively violent and fear producing rather than unifying and thought provoking. One potentially useful aspect of the psychopolitical indicator, controlling the “tone of the street,” I will combine with indicator 12 (marking territory for a specific group) to incorporate into a more positive indicator called *transforming the meaning of space*. Murals can democratize space by placing working-class content in an upper-class/restricted area. Such incongruity between a mural’s content and location may also draw attention to the ways that social problems, such as inequality and repression, may be physically reinforced by space.

Another indicator that may fit into *transforming the meaning of space* is (2) using “street culture” for a widespread dissemination of message. However, though Chaffee focuses on art in the streets, murals may also be located indoors. Therefore, classifying “street culture” as a primary indicator of a mural’s social impact is not conducive to my analysis. Nevertheless, the popular street culture of Latin America has indeed been a motivating cause for the development of several political mural movements, and thus it fits well into *transforming the meaning of space*: with the addition of murals, the streets become a venue for alternative media expression by the marginalized – a space where the voice of the *pueblo* (common people) will be at least seen if not heard.

Personal catharsis (1), according to Chaffee, is usually a motivation for an individual graffiti artist to release pent-up anger after a long and repressive authoritarian regime. It is possible to interpret catharsis as promoting grassroots
democracy and cultural and political autonomy: the muralist’s sense of efficacy may be augmented because she feels her mark on the wall is actively and importantly critiquing the previous regime. While this sense of individual efficacy is beneficial, catharsis can be isolating and even destructive, causing individuals to ruminate in the storm of their own negative emotions. As it is defined as an individual experience, catharsis in itself is an example of one-way communication, not necessarily involving the dialogical communication necessary to build a social movement.

What I find helpful about Chaffee’s discussion of “catharsis” is his mention of the collective “historical memory” (Chaffee, 10) recorded through cathartic murals. For this reason I reconfigure this category to be called historical memory. As Paula Alcatruz Riquelme states, memory is power – in the case of Chile, it continues to inform those who did not live through the Pinochet dictatorship, helping to ensure that the tragedies of the past will never happen again (Alcatruz Riquelme, 16).

Historical memory is not limited to the traumatic events of an authoritarian dictatorship, however. It also tells the story of the pueblo, or common people, documenting events that might not appear in official history textbooks.

The first half of “catharsis,” as well as the category of political inspiration and morale (indicator 16), better fit into a new category I call citizen empowerment. When we were planning the Cold Spring Mural, Mayuli Bales stressed that she wanted the youth to be empowered. One of the qualifications for that empowerment was active participation in the mural process. This instills in the participant the feeling that he is helping create something bigger than himself, and that his opinion matters in that big something. Citizen empowerment increases an individual’s sense of efficacy by giving her the experience and tools necessary to go out into the world and lead her own project. Unlike “catharsis,” which is limited to an individual’s experience, citizen empowerment is dependent on the collective process of working with others. Indeed, Everett M. Rogers and Arvind Singhal define empowerment as “a communication process that often results from individuals communicating in small groups” (Rogers and Singhal, 69).
Historically, governments have often used murals and public art to promote their policies and agendas (9). These agendas may not promote social progress as I define it; for example, Chaffee mentions “Hitler’s World War II bunker... [which was] replete with murals glorifying the Nazis, all aimed at keeping morale high” (Chaffee 20). Raising morale is not necessarily bad, but given that at the time the Nazis were committing grave crimes against human rights, these “glorifying” murals are appalling. Chaffee also cites the right-wing dictatorships of Paraguay, Chile, Argentina, and Spain that used street art to instill fear in their citizens (Chaffee 16). Even more positive government agendas – such as those promoting economic equality or racial/cultural integration – occurring at a national level often conflict with the goal of fostering localized, grassroots organization. Therefore, promoting the state (9) is not in itself a useful indicator for my definition of social progress.

A more positive national agenda is the literacy campaign (14), which may promote democracy by teaching people to read. The effectiveness of a mural in increasing viewer literacy is debatable, but the main goals of these campaigns have often been to educate the public on the nation’s historical memory and cultural identity (3), two things a mural is more than capable of. Cultivating a common cultural identity helps to build cultural and political autonomy for the country as a whole.

Marginalized groups also commonly use murals to celebrate their own cultural identities (3, 4), pushing for cultural and political autonomy from the government and the mass media. Juan “Chin Chin” Tralma, co-founder of Chile’s political mural brigade la Brigada Ramona Parra (BRP), spoke of the brigade’s constant fight against the mass media, which continually defamed the BRP with false news stories about the members as violent rabble-rousers, sex-offenders, and dog-eaters (Tralma, Personal Interview). Even today, after the BRP Collective has gained a prestigious international reputation, Chin Chin still is critical of mass media attention: “… la consciencia no se aumenta por la televisión”3 (Tralma, Personal Interview).

3 “… consciousness is not raised by television” (translated by the author).
It is difficult to negate Chin Chin’s opinion that television does not help to raise public awareness on important issues; indeed television and the mass media often fill people’s brains with mind-numbing garbage. However, it must be recognized that the mass media are a powerful tool for shaping public consciousness, a tool that may be used to promote positive or negative effects. Therefore, if a mural can influence the mass media in a way that is positive, it will magnify its own impact on social progress.

Whether the media’s attention is positive or negative, it recognizes the marginalized culture’s message, which can promote healthy conversation with the dominant culture. Indicator 4, which is about providing a voice to counter the mass media, essentially includes combating commercial advertising (indicator 14), which is also similar to influencing the “dominant media” (indicator 5). Therefore I shall merge these categories into one: *combating/influencing the dominant mass media.*

Because marginalized groups in Latin America have not had access to the mass media, they have used street murals to advertise their political campaigns (indicator 6) and announce special events (indicator 7) (Chaffee). I will combine these indicators into *recruiting popular support for a cause.* When recruiting for a cause it is important to have what Chaffee calls “name recognition” (Chaffee 32) – to be well known by those people you wish to recruit. During dictatorships when government censorship was particularly strong, *rayados,* or street paintings *showed the existence of organized resistance to the regime* (10). This evidence of grassroots resistance gave people hope and also recruited more members to the cause.

Promoting a grassroots image (8), though it may seem to fit perfectly with my criteria for social change, is not an end in itself. Having the *appearance* of grassroots organization is not the same thing as *being* truly grassroots: Chaffee cites examples of repressive regimes that organized “grassroots” street painting. In Chile’s 1988 referendum on Pinochet’s continued governance, the regime sent people all over the streets to paint over anti-Pinochet “No” slogans with “Yes” (Chaffee 15). Thus by itself this is not an appropriate category to use for my analysis. However, “portraying a grass-roots image” may be incorporated into more
telling indicators such as (10) *showing existence of organized resistance to an oppressive regime* and my new indicator *recruiting popular support for a cause.*

And so I have distilled these motivating factors for street art and transformed them into indicators of a mural’s contribution to social progress in Latino/Latin American culture. My new list is as follows: 1) *transforming the meaning of space,* 2) *recording historical memory,* 3) *providing a voice for the marginalized,* 4) *combating/influencing the dominant mass media,* 5) *showing the existence of organized resistance against a repressive regime,* 6) *recruiting popular support for a cause,* 7) *celebrating a common cultural identity,* and 8) *empowering citizens through involvement in the mural process.* It is important to reiterate that not all of these indicators will apply to every mural, and to acknowledge that these indicators may also be used to promote negative social change.

In the following sections I will use these lenses of analysis to explore the social motivations for and the *positive* social impact of distinct styles of murals and mural-practice. The main types of murals that I will examine include: state-supported, antiestablishment, and community-based. In the section on community-based muralism I will expand on the social importance of *mural practice.* Specific examples of different types of muralism from Mexico, Chile, and the United States serve to illustrate my points.

**MURALS SUPPORTED BY THE STATE**

State-supported murals are government financed and usually painted by well-established artists. Their purpose is to promote a government’s agenda, such as campaigns for literacy or national pride. A government uses the mural as a propaganda tool to portray itself in a flattering light.
The Mexican School

The Mexican Mural Renaissance, a state-supported phenomenon, was motivated by the conservative elite’s attempt to reconsolidate its power after the chaotic decade of political turmoil of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). The goals of the Revolution had been “agrarian reform, land distribution, and socialist education” (Indych-López 12), but the bloody battle failed to accomplish much at all. By the end of the fighting in 1920, the newly elected president, Álvaro Obregón, and his administration of elites were determined to sculpt the revolutionary dust into “an illusion of reform,” uniting the country towards a new future (Indych-López 13). This cultural unity would be visually manifested through state-sponsored public art.

Even though the revolution itself had proven unsuccessful at generating positive social changes, the post-revolutionary period brought real reforms that paved the way for muralism. Educational reform played an especially important role; the Secretaria de Educación Pública’s director José Vasconcelos ordered the construction of “1,159 new schools and 455 new libraries between 1921 and 1922” (Campbell, 42). These buildings provided the blank space where muralists would come to define the new “hispanoamerican culture,” educating the public on the power of Mexico's hybrid mestizo race, or “raza cósmica” (cosmic race), as envisioned by Vasconcelos (cited in Campbell 42, 43). In this way, the murals would define the common cultural identity (indicator 7) of the new government, incorporating the masses into this identity so as to promote unity and political efficacy among the people.

Leonard Folgarait elaborates on how these murals incorporated the masses into Mexico's common cultural identity in order to maintain power over them: if viewers of a mural can identify with its use of signs or symbols from their life experience, they “can be convinced that they recognize parts of themselves in the system because the system understands them and is sharing an ideological space with them” (15). The success of a mural thus depended on the artist’s understanding of common cultural codes. By using recognizable codes to portray the masses in a state of empowerment within the government system, the masses would be less
likely to rebel against it. In this way, murals inspired popular support of the
government that conversely maintained power over its population. Although the
building of a common cultural identity is an indicator of social change, in this case it
undermines grassroots democracy by defining that identity according to the elite.

Vasconcelos believed that art was the most effective way to influence the public, even more so than a politician’s speech: “Men are more malleable... when
approached through their senses, as happens when one contemplates beautiful
forms and figures, or hears beautiful rhythms and melodies” (qtd. in Folgarait, Mural
34). He therefore took great pains to recruit some of the most talented artists he
could find. Three of Vasconcelos’ recruits, Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and
David Álvaro Siqueiros, would later become known as los tres grandes (the three
greats), the most famous artists of the Mexican Mural Renaissance.

When analyzing the social impact of murals by los tres grandes, it is
important to highlight the political and financial support that the Mexican
government gave to them. Both Rivera and Siqueiros received funding to study art
abroad: Rivera studied the Renaissance frescoes of Italy and Siqueiros practiced
easel painting in Paris (Folgarait, Mural). Upon returning to Mexico, these two
artists each received well-paid government positions with lofty titles. Rivera
became “consultant and draftsman for the Department of Libraries and Archives,”
and Siqueiros Professor of Drawing and Handicrafts (Folgarait, Mural 22). Orozco
received not one, but two important government positions in 1922. The privilege
experienced by these three artists is a stark contrast to the pueblo rhetoric for which
they became famous.

At first the government-sponsored muralists went along with Vasconcelos’
concept of national identity. Vasconcelos was a criollo, or Mexican of pure Spanish
blood; yet he was fascinated with the mestizo race (Folgarait Mural 17). He viewed
the mestizo race, a fusion of indigenous and Spanish heritage, as “the cosmic race”,
superior to all others. Ironically, despite his apparent regard for indigenous people
on a racial level, he did not value any part of their culture, and he hoped for their
complete assimilation into a European way of life (Folgarait, Mural 17).
In Diego Rivera’s first mural in Mexico, *Creation*, he illustrates precisely Vasconcelos’ concept of the *raza cósmica*. The mural is painted inside the Bolívar Auditorium in a classical Renaissance style (Figure 2). It depicts two naked natives being educated by several enlightened Europeans, most of whom are white and/or wearing angelic halos (Folgarait *Mural* 40-41). A few darker-skinned individuals stand among the intellectuals, possibly representing the culmination of the *raza cósmica*. The mural was inaugurated in 1923, and the public’s reaction to it is telling of its social impact at the time: the upper class reveled in its beauty, while the lower class despised it.

*Creation* promoted the state’s agenda to establish a new national *cultural identity* built on the idea of the cosmic race and the *historical memory* of the ancient European traditions. Although the mural incorporated two indicators of social change, it did not further any of the aspects of my definition of social progress. It celebrated the current social hierarchy, thereby failing to promote economic equality or grassroots democracy. The mural promoted racial/cultural integration, but in a twisted way that did not allow for autonomy of the indigenous - the indigenous culture was called to dissolve into the superior European culture. Similarly, this glorification of European scientific and artistic traditions did not even promote Mexico’s cultural or political autonomy as the country was portrayed as a derivative of Europe.

Tension developed between Vasconcelos and the muralists as they began to break away from this classical, Renaissance-style painting and move toward more nationalist and indigenous themes. These tensions reflect the struggle for control over the definition of Mexico’s national identity (Campbell 47), which in turn could be used to define the nature of Mexico’s cultural and political autonomy. Rivera wrestles with Mexico’s national identity in his mural at the Palacio Nacional, *History of Mexico: From the Conquest to the Future* (1929). This mural reveals Rivera’s unique treatment of *historical memory*. According to Ida Rodríguez-Prampolini, Rivera’s historical murals emphasized conflict between two opposite ideologies (“thesis” and “antithesis”) that would eventually be resolved (“synthesis”) (Rodríguez-Prampolini 131, 132). He thus infused the public’s collective *historical*
memory with this dialectical perspective, one that reflected the real identity conflict going on at the time.

The three mural panels in the Palacio Nacional are organized chronologically from right to left: from “Prehispanic Mexico” to “From the Conquest to the Present” to “Mexico of Today and the Future” (Figures 3, 4, and 5; Folgarait, Mural 90). These panels of the mural can be also divided into thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, respectively.

In History of Mexico we can see the “thesis” in “Prehispanic Mexico,” where the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl sits on a throne surrounded by a circle of indigenous attendants. This panel is full of productive workers: picking corn, building pyramids, carving stones, and crafting ceramics (Folgarait Mural 90). By the time of this mural, Rivera had found his famous style of indigenismo, a painting style that mixed social realism with glorification of the indigenous people. Social realism is a style of painting that was used by Soviet Union (formed 1917) to promote the nation’s “communist ideals” by visually celebrating the proletariat in a way he/she could understand (Folgarait, Mural 3). Through indigenismo, Rivera combines the proletariat with the indigenous person, resulting in an artwork that both conveys Rivera’s communism and identifies with the pueblo, or common people, of Mexico.

The “antithesis” of this piece is visible in the chaotic confrontation of the middle panel, “From the Conquest to the Present.” This panel is too full of historical events to name them all, but some highlights include: the arrival of Cortés and the birth of the first mestizo by his Indian mistress Malinche (Folgarait Mural 91); the wars between the Indians and conquistadores; the Mexican Independence movement (1810 – 1821); the dictatorships of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1880, 1884-1911); and the protagonists of the Mexican Revolution (1910 – 1920), Francisco Madero and Emiliano Zapata. In the very center of this panel is an eagle clasping an Aztec war banner in its beak, reminiscent of the Mexican flag, and of the ancient Aztec prophesy that told the Aztecs to settle where they saw “an eagle perched on a cactus, holding a serpent in its mouth” (Folgarait Mural 96). This place became the Aztec capitol Tenochtitlán, present-day Mexico City (Folgarait Mural 95).
Up until this point, much of the conflict in History of Mexico arises between the traditional indigenous and modern western cultures. By the far left panel, these opposing elements have been somewhat synthesized, but now appears a new conflict: the class struggle of the post-revolutionary period. Karl Marx, placed at the top of the composition and emphasized with hieratic scale, points young revolutionaries toward the horizon and holds a document that reads: “THE HISTORY OF ALL HITHERTO EXISTING SOCIETY IS THE HISTORY OF CLASS STRUGGLE. For us, it is not a matter of transforming private property, but of abolishing it; not a matter of obscuring differences between classes but of destroying them. IT IS NOT A MATTER OF REFORMING SOCIETY AS IT EXISTS, BUT RATHER OF FORMING A NEW ONE. = KARL MARX” (qtd. in Folgarait Mural 98).

Below Marx, wealthy capitalists sit comfortably inside rooms delineated by industrial pipes, isolated from the outside world. I take this to be a critique of capitalists’ thriving off of industry at the expense of toiling laborers. Striking workers are depicted carrying a red banner proclaiming “HUELGA” (“STRIKE”) in protest, while being met with violence from officials wearing gas masks. Further adding to the class drama are a mob of workers attending a speech by a fiery labor orator, and two lynched workers wearing signs marking them as “comunista” (communist) and “agrarista4.”

The social intent of the imagery in History of Mexico in the Palacio Nacional can be seen through several indicators. I have discussed in detail the historical memory it recorded, with the goal of making the nation’s history available to the illiterate. This history serves to promote a national cultural identity. It also pictorially raised the common laborer to a position of organized power in present-day Mexico, providing a voice for the marginalized. The union imagery and Marx’s message seem also to call the lower-class viewers to join the fight against capitalism, which is evidence of recruiting popular support for a cause.

The representation of indigenous people and worker groups inside the Palacio Nacional (National Palace) transformed the meaning of the building by

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4 Agrarian reform advocate
placing working-class content inside a regal institution. It may be argued that this resonated with the working-class viewer, giving them a sense of belonging and national pride. However, Gustavo Lira, contemporary Mexican muralist residing and working in Minnesota, questions the value of these pro-pueblo murals inside such a prestigious location. Though the Palacio Nacional is public space, Lira says that the enormously exalted status of the historic building intimidates the common person from even entering, let alone visit long enough to view the murals (Lira, Personal Interview). Because the mural is indoors, visibility is limited, especially for lower-class citizens. Thus, despite the social indicators visible in the mural’s imagery (recording of historical memory, formation of a common cultural identity, providing a voice for the marginalized, and recruiting popular support for a cause), the message failed to unite many of the working class into a social movement and thus was arguably not as socially effective as it could have been.

Working-class citizens that were able to see Rivera’s indoor murals often took offense at the ugliness of the figures that supposedly represented them (Campbell 47). Rivera’s historic mural at the Palacio Nacional was likely subject to this negative reaction; though it aimed to promote working-class solidarity, it fell short of doing so by failing to involve working class citizens in dialogical communication to define their collective identity (Melucci’s first characteristic of a social movement). Instead, Rivera, an elite artist, imposed on the working class his own definition of their identity. He also defined the social conflict (class conflict) in his own terms without involving everyday Mexicans in the process. Thus, History of Mexico: From the Conquest to the Future arguably fails to meet Melucci’s first two characteristics of a social movement: group solidarity and collective definition of a conflict.

In 1947, Rivera painted another indoor mural, this time for a private patron. Sueño de una tarde dominical en la Alameda Central⁵ (Figure 6), inside the Hotel de Prado, is a mural dream of Rivera’s childhood memories (Raíces iconográficas, 12). The most socially significant element of the mural was the figure of Ignacio Ramírez,

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⁵ *Dream of a Sunday Afternoon on the Alameda Central*
also known as El Nigromante, holding up the phrase: “Dios no existe” (“God does not exist”). This refers to Ramírez’s speech he gave upon admittance to the Academia de Letrán, in which he claimed: “Dios no existe y la naturaleza se sostiene por sí misma”6 (qtd. in Raíces iconográficas, 13). When El Nigromante first spoke these words about one hundred years before, the brief tension they caused did not hinder his acceptance into the Academy. Rivera’s mural, in contrast, incited a national scandal in which Mexico’s Archbishop even refused to bless the building where the mural was housed (Belkin 232-233).

Although Sueño de una tarde dominical was nearly inaccessible to the pueblo due to its location, it transformed the meaning of the private hotel space into a national forum through the furor it provoked in the press. The mural highlighted a piece of historical memory that questioned Mexico’s common cultural identity of Catholicism. Bringing this into question promoted cultural and political autonomy for marginalized, non-Catholic Mexicans. While this is positive, such an inflammatory and divisive statement may have hindered the cultural integration that would have increased tolerance of differing religious beliefs. It is also noted that Rivera used the scandal to “promocionar su pintura, el arte en general y el mural en particular”7 (Raíces iconográficas, 13), in other words, to promote himself as an artist. And so, while this national conversation regarding Mexico’s Catholicism may be significant, it seems to be a mere by-product of Rivera’s self-promotion.

Rivera also painted several interior murals in the United States that were more effective in bringing about social change. They transformed the meaning of American buildings by embellishing them with working class and indigenous content. This led to transculturation between Mexico and the United States. 

Transculturation is a term coined in 1940 by Fernando Ortiz, a Cuban anthropologist and ethnographer (Rojas, 1). It refers to the complex interactions between two cultural groups that result in their mutual transformation, similar to Rogers’

6 “God does not exist and nature is sustained by itself” (translated by the author)
7 “promote his painting, art in general and the mural in particular” (translated by the author)
definition of dialogic communication as applied to social change. Transculturation is comparable to providing a voice for the marginalized, in that it places a marginalized group in dialogue with the dominant culture. However, transculturation extends that idea further by not only letting the marginalized culture be heard, but also allowing it to change the dominant culture in a profound way. Through transculturation, the dominant culture adopts a piece of the marginalized culture as its own. In the case of Rivera’s murals, the dominant U.S. culture began to adopt aspects of Mexican muralism. Transculturation can be seen as a sub-category of the social progress goal of racial/cultural integration.

Rivera’s *Detroit Industry* (1932-1933) one of Rivera’s most famous U.S. murals, is one example of transculturation. The imagery in *Detroit Industry* glorifies the worker and machine-like efficiency of the Detroit automobile industry. While the Ford Corporation presumably commissioned this work to advertise their company, Rivera subtly placed aspects of Mexico’s pre-Columbian culture into the mural; one of the machines takes the form of the goddess Coatlicue, represented in monumental Aztec sculpture (Figure 7; Cardoza y Aragón 187).

Besides incorporating indigenous symbolism into *Detroit Industry*, Rivera also painted in other cultures and races: monumental female nudes represent each race: “Black, Yellow, Red, and White” (Figures 7 and 8; Cardoza y Aragón). While the presence of multiple races may at first seem unifying, the titles underscore society’s habit of labeling by skin color. Furthermore, the static and separate nature of the figures emphasizes racial categorization and segregation. While the inclusion of diverse races was a step in the right direction for 1933, this divided design comes short of fulfilling my criteria for promoting racial integration today.

An even more influential mural with respect to transculturation was *The Making of a Fresco: Showing the Building of a City*, commissioned by the California School of Fine Arts (CFSA) in San Francisco in 1931 (Lee). In this design Rivera depicts a team of muralists in process – as proletarian workers in service to the public good (Figure 9). Given the mural’s location in the California School of Fine Arts, it was available to radical students and alumni for viewing during the mural process (Lee 77). Therefore, beyond the mural’s *representation* of the mural-making
process, the live process itself became a kind of performance for instructing future public muralists. Some of the artists who observed Rivera were likely were hired by the U.S. government’s own public art projects of the 1930s.

When *The Making of a Fresco* was painted in 1931, the United States was struggling from the Great Depression that had devastated the nation after the stock market crash of 1929. In 1933, American artist George Biddle, friend of Diego Rivera, wrote a letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt suggesting that the U.S. government follow Mexico’s example by creating jobs for public artists (O’Connor 170). That same year Roosevelt's administration created several public art programs to employ artists and raise the country’s morale.

Created in 1933, the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) “anticipated financing some 2,500 artists and 500 laborers in an American artistic renaissance,” paying them $1.00 an hour for a 30-hour week (qtd. in Asbury, 20). Edward Bruce, head of the PWAP, commented on the workers’ feelings toward their new jobs in 1934: “... there have been almost unanimous expressions of gratitude for the employment and of the happiness that the artists feel in assurance of a living wage with the opportunity to work at the things they love to do...” (qtd. in Asbury, 20).

Grant Wood, assistant professor at the University of Iowa and supervisor of a PWAP mural, spoke of the camaraderie that developed amongst his previously divided team of artists. Their friendship was so strong that “[w]hen the PWAP reduced regional quotas, Wood’s artists decided to pool and reallocate their checks rather than have the group broken up” (qtd. in Cockcroft, Weber, and Cockcroft 109). This philosophy of equality among art-workers highlights a substantial divergence from the Mexican School’s tres grandes mentality of the master artist.

The Federal Art Project (FAP) of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP) together produced over 2,500 public murals (Asbury, 22). The New Deal mural projects were undoubtedly inspired by Mexico’s government-sponsored muralism. San Francisco’s Coit Tower murals are evidence of the transnational social impact of the Mexican Mural Renaissance, particularly of Rivera’s *The Making of a Fresco*, which Rivera painted in the same city just three years before. Rivera’s thematic and stylistic influence is also especially
visible in the Coit Tower murals, which were painted by twenty-six PWAP muralists - three of whom had previous experience painting with Rivera (O’Connor 171).

Like Rivera’s murals, those in the Coit Tower depicted daily life with a special focus on the worker and industry. However, beyond Rivera’s tactic of simply glorifying the worker pictorially, the PWAP advanced to the next level by providing jobs for thousands of real working-class citizens in the U.S., furthering the social goal of economic equality and prosperity during the difficult time of the Great Depression. This is in great part due to the influence of Rivera’s U.S. murals and those of his Mexican counterparts. The U.S. adoption of state-sponsored muralism from the supposedly “inferior” Mexican culture is a profound example of transculturation and racial/cultural integration.

Thus, while the Mexican School model of institutionally supported, individual artist murals provided for only minimal social progress in Mexico at the time, it inspired later mural movements that did create extensive positive change, including FDR's public art programs. Mexican murals in the United States also influenced the Chicano mural movement that began in the 1960s. This grassroots movement promoted Chicanos’ cultural and political autonomy, and also furthered the social goal of racial/cultural integration in the United States. I will return to the Chicano mural movement in the section on community muralism.

Chile’s Museo a Cielo Abierto de Valparaíso

Just as the Mexican government sponsored mural projects to glorify the success of the Mexican Revolution, the Chilean government, following the end of the dictatorship in the early 1990s, began to fund public art projects to unify its divided people. One such project is the Museo a Cielo Abierto de Valparaíso (Open-Sky Museum of Valparaíso), inaugurated in 1992. During the first few days of my study abroad in Chile in 2010, I had the privilege of coming across the Museo in the meandering hills of the city of Valparaíso.

According to Chile’s tourism website, the Museo was funded by the city government of Valparaíso and the Pontífica Universidad Católica de Valparaíso
PUCV. PUCV students painted murals based on original sketches by famous artists. Some of these artists included Gracia Barrios, José Balmes, and Roberto Matta, who created pro-Allende murals in the era of the UP. The murals were mostly abstract and therefore appeared apolitical. The goal of the Museo was to “llevar el arte a toda la población [to bring art to everyone],” words reminiscent of the spirit of Allende’s administration (Turismo Chile).

The murals indeed beautify the streets of Valparaíso, and simple references to Chilean culture, such as the maraqueta (a signature type of Chilean bread), define part of a common Chilean identity (Figure 10). While on one hand I view the Museo as a positive cultural expression, on the other I see it as a naïve attempt to glue the community back together by simply glossing over the cracks formed by the dictatorship. It fails to address the difficult truths many Chileans yearned to express. In response to this lapse in official historical memory, muralist brigades have recorded the memory of the dictatorship on the city's walls through antiestablishment murals.

**ANTESTABLISHMENT MURALS**

Antiestablishment murals do not have institutional support. They are illegal in that they mark up private or public property, asserting control of the space. Many are ephemeral, not meant to last; often their primary significance lies in the defiant act of painting. Because of their ephemeral, clandestine nature, antiestablishment murals often teeter on the edge between muralism and graffiti.

Indeed, the iconic style of Chile’s Brigada Ramona Parra muralist brigade was born out of political graffiti wars in the late 1960s. Brigades, or teams of painters, usually aligned with a specific political party, would drive around in vans day and night painting the walls of the streets. Many of these first wall paintings were not considered murals, but rather rayados (graffiti), consisting simply of bold-lettered messages (Zelada, Fernández, and Márquez, 13).

These graffiti wars developed in the context of the Cold War. The 1959 Cuban Revolution fanned the flames of the United States’ fear of the spread of Communism
in Latin America. This fear led to the 1965 U.S. military intervention in the Dominican Republic. Chile's president at the time, Eduardo Frei, denounced the United States’ actions at the Organization of the American States. Even though Chile’s previous president Alessandri had broken off relations with Cuba, Frei’s neutral stance coupled with Chile’s restoration of “diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe” (Collier and Sater 310) caused the United States Defense Department to be concerned. That same year, it became publicly known that the U.S. Defense Department was investigating Chile’s “international war potential” in a project called “Project Camelot” (Collier and Sater 310). This caused such a strong reaction from Chilean Leftist groups – including many street painters - that the U.S. was forced to end the project.

These street painters included La Brigada Ramona Parra (BRP). One of the most famous brigades, the BRP was founded in 1964 by Alejandro “Mono” González and Juan “Chin Chin” Tralma from the Juventudes Comunistas (Communist Youth), (Tralma, Personal Interview), and named in honor of a young communist woman who had been killed by the police in 1947 during a strike of nitrate miners (Zelada, Fernández, and Márquez, 12). Members of the newly formed BRP were outraged by Project Camelot, interpreting this investigation as espionage directed at the Chilean Left (Collier and Sater 310). To mobilize the public against U.S. imperialism, the BRP wrote phrases such as “No al Fascismo (Down with Fascism),” “Venceremos, (We shall overcome),” and “Yanki Agresor (Yankee Aggressor)” (Zelada, Fernández, and Márquez, 13). The anti-U.S. expression was also about United States economic imperialism – Chin Chin asserts that one of the primary goals of the BRP was to fight against international business: “Nosotros damos una gran lucha contra las empresas internacionales, y especialmente en los Estados Unidos, la ITT... que traían grandes cantidades de publicistas”8 (Tralma, Personal Interview).

In addition to Project Camelot in 1965, Chile was also suffering from internal problems. Frei’s presidency was marked by reforms that failed to appease the

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8 “We put up a great fight against international business, especially from the United States, the ITT... that were bringing large quantities of advertising agents” (translated by the author).
Chilean Left. These reforms included: *promoción popular*, land reform; agrarian reform; education and welfare; and “Chileanization” of copper and other industries (Collier and Sater 311).

Frei’s reforms aimed to promote positive social change. *Promoción popular* was a way of facilitating the organization of underdeveloped communities by creating special “self-helping” groups, such as *centros de madres* (mother’s centers) and *juntas de vecinos* (neighborhood committees) (Collier and Sater 311). This would encourage cultural and political autonomy for local communities, and foster grassroots democracy. Agrarian reforms, land reforms, and welfare aimed for economic equality by redistributing land and providing social services for the needy. In practice, however, many of the reforms failed to achieve the dramatic changes that the Chilean Left desired, creating tension that occasionally broke out in conflict.

One problem of the reforms Frei initiated was that they came at a high cost – spending doubled during his four-year term. He hoped to pay for them by “Chileanizing” the copper industry, which, as a milder variation of nationalization, gave the government 51% ownership. Unfortunately, this did not provide the financial support that Frei had hoped for, and Chile suffered rapid inflation. In an attempt to boost government revenue in 1967, Frei’s Finance Minister Sergio Molina proposed a five percent cut from the workers’ annual wage increase. Workers would be compensated with long-term government bonds, but they would not be allowed to strike for one year (Collier and Sater 319). As a Communist organization, the BRP would have been enraged by Molina’s measure, seeing it as a threat to workers’ rights to organize for political autonomy and economic equality. Members of the Chilean Left reacted strongly – the *Central Unica de Trabajadores* (CUT) held a general strike, where the police killed four workers and one child. This kind of police violence is evidence of the government’s repression of working-class political autonomy.

Conflict broke out around Frei’s agrarian reforms as well. These reforms had established unions and expropriated any land on farms over 80 hectares (Collier and Sater, 313-314). By 1970, about 500 unions had been established and 1,300 haciendas had been expropriated (Collier and Sater). However, this land
redistribution wasn’t fast enough progress for some members of the Left, who grew anxious and began to instigate their own land tomas, or takeovers. The Frei administration’s reaction to these tomas proved disastrous. In 1969, police killed eight squatters and wounded fifty others in an attempt to remove them from the land (Collier and Sater 325). The unfortunate event became known as the “masacre de Puerto Montt,” vociferously condemned by the BRP and other leftist groups.

During the presidential election year of 1969-1970, BRP rayados critiqued the blunders of the Frei administration and supported Salvador Allende, the new presidential candidate for the socialist coalition the Unidad Popular (UP). By that year, 150 BRP brigades were formed around the country, headed by Chin Chin and his central brigade in Santiago (Tralma, Personal Interview). Most BRP brigadistas, or brigade members, were young students or workers ages 14 – 17 (Zelada, Fernández, and Márquez, 12); Chin Chin himself was around 14 when he started painting (Tralma, Personal Interview). The political consciousness and organization exhibited by these youth is astounding for their young age.

This high level of organization was also visible in the BRP’s painting process. BRP propaganda painting was a covert operation – vandalizing public or private property was illegal. To avoid getting caught and arrested, they had to develop quick and efficient work methods. They divided the wall painting into four separate jobs: “tracers, backgrounders, fill-inners, and outliners” - one job for each team member (translated by the author, Sandoval Espinoza, 30). The BRP’s first series of rayados were typically simple black letters on a yellow background (Figure 11; Zelada, Fernández, and Márquez, 13), but with time their technique allowed them to develop the rayados into wall paintings with more detail, in contrast to other brigades that were only able to leave quick marks on the wall (Sandoval Espinoza).

These other brigades were often competing for the best, most visible wall space, and as a result, walls were constantly changing. Chin Chin, one of the founders of the BRP, commented that the BRP would re-paint the same wall up to four times in one day (Tralma, Personal Interview).

When I asked Chin Chin if he considered these rayados as murals, he said no:
“No es mural [simplemente] porque está en el muro... cuando haces un rayado callejero, estás mandando un mensaje. Cuando tú estás haciendo un mural, estás mandando el mismo mensaje a lo mejor, pero con entremedio de imágenes ... el imagen es la que a ti te lleva a reflexionar, qué lo queremos decir... eso es la forma de educar” (Tralma, Personal Interview).

I agree with Chin Chin in the sense that images are more open to viewer interpretation and reflection than are didactic words. (This process of reflection and education that Chin Chin speaks of is reminiscent of Rogers’ application of Freire’s theory of dialogical communication to social change.) Through the BRP’s murals, the voice of the marginalized (indicator 3) influenced personal reflection and public conversation.

The BRP’s first true murals with images began to appear after the election of Salvador Allende as president in 1970. The Allende administration was fascinated by the idea of bringing art to the people, promoting “arte al servicio del pueblo [art at the service of the people]” (cited in Zelada, Fernández, and Márquez, 18). Taking this to heart, the BRP began to focus on aesthetics, spending more time on each design. They added more colors and images to their work, as if to celebrate their political victory (see Figures 12 and 13). Artist José Balmes compares this joyful new style to Mexican muralism:

“El fin del mural es expresar alegría. En la mayoría de los muros libres de Santiago estaba esta pintura concientizadora, con un diseño simple, altamente impactante, con colores primarios, que yo asociaba con el muralismo mexicano” (qtd. in Zelada, Fernández, and Márquez, and Fernández 17).

Mono González and Chin Chin, however, both disagree that there ever existed such an influence from the Mexican School. Chin Chin explained that the Mexican

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9 “it’s not a mural [simply] because it is on the wall... when you make street graffiti, you are sending a message. When you make a mural, you are sending the same message at best, but through images... the image is what causes you to reflect, [on] what we want to say... that is the way to educate"

10 “The purpose of a mural is to express joy. In most of the free walls in Santiago was this consciousness-raising painting, with a simple, high impact design, with primary colors, that I associated with Mexican Muralism” (translated by the author).

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School muralists were elite artists that painted with a special technique, while in contrast the BRP brigadistas were working-class citizens that painted in bold, solid colors (Tralma, Personal Interview). Mono González even went so far as to say that the BRP aimed to reject the traditions of Mexican muralism (González, Personal Interview).

José Balmes was one of several established artists that the BRP invited to paint with their group. Zelada, Fernández, and Márquez affirm that even though the BRP invited artists to paint with them, the artwork was still generated by the people (Zelada, Fernández, and Márquez, 48), because BRP members were of the pueblo. Inviting an artist to paint alongside them differed from an artist imposing his or her own artistic vision on the people. Chin Chin felt that the elite individual-artist model of Mexican School muralists patronized the working class: “No hay que subestimar al obrero; el obrero no es tonto... y es allí cuando mira la diferencia de nosotros con el mural mexicano...”11 (Tralma, Personal Interview).

Even though Mexican Renaissance murals are not very similar in aesthetics or practice to BRP murals, both supported the reform initiatives of a new government. It is important to highlight that in contrast to the Mexican government's financial support of muralists, the Chilean government did not financially support the BRP. Like their method of painting, funding for the BRP was grassroots – they received donations from unions, party members, and working-class citizens (Zelada, Fernández, and Márquez, 15).

Allende and the Unidad Popular had several goals for the country’s reform and transformation to socialism, called the “40 medidas,” or “40 measures” (Zelada, Fernández, and Márquez, 16). To educate the masses about these reforms, the themes of the BRP murals then began to promote these “40 medidas”: “Entonces, esas cuarenta medidas son las que empezamos y allí empieza la cosa de muralismo. Que empieza, ‘el cobre para Chile’... y se empieza a pintar mineros... después está ‘un

11 “One must not underestimate the worker; the worker is not stupid... and it's there when one sees the difference between us [the BRP] and Mexican Muralism” (translated by the author).
litro de leche para los niños’...” (translated by the author). The murals of the 40 medidas are examples of indicator 6: recruiting support for a cause. Their nationalist rhetoric also promoted a common cultural identity (indicator 7). Figures 14 and 15 are examples of these “40 medidas” murals created by the BRP during the Unidad Popular.

The arts flourished under the UP until September 11, 1973, when a military coup bombarded La Moneda (the presidential palace) and killed President Salvador Allende. The coup was led by the Chilean military and supported by the United States CIA, which, fearing the spread of communism, decided they needed to put a stop to Chile’s Socialist, democratically elected government. General Augusto Pinochet took over as dictator. He forbid the people’s right to assembly and began hunting down Leftist political dissidents for arrest (Zelada, Fernández, and Márquez, 21). Most forced disappearances, or undocumented arrests, occurred in the period shortly after the coup, from 1974 -1977 (Valdivia Ortíz de Zárate 188). The disappeared would be blindfolded and carted of to one of the military’s secret detention centers, where they would be tortured physically and psychologically. Many times torture was so severe the victims would die.

Chin Chin explained to me the difficult decision he had to make to dissolve the Brigada Ramona Parra on that fateful September 11; he felt he couldn’t risk youths’ lives by sending them out to paint in the bullet-ridden streets. Although the BRP officially dissolved in 1973, Chin Chin and others continued the “lucha callejera,” or street resistance. Chin Chin drew for me the first manifestation of resistance (Figure 16): “Esta fue la primera manifestación de resistencia... El círculo es la unidad, la R es resistencia, y la estrella Ramona Parra” (Tralma, Personal Interview). Chin Chin drew this symbol with chalk on the streets of Santiago around 3:00 in the afternoon on the day of the coup (Tralma, Personal Interview). Chalk as

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12 “And so, those forty measures are what we started with, and there began the thing called muralism. It starts, ‘Copper for Chile’... and they begin to paint miners... after that ‘a liter of milk for the children’” (translated by the author).

13 “This was the first manifestation of resistance... the circle is ‘unity,’ R is ‘resistance,’ and the star Ramona Parra” (translated by the author).
a medium was more effective than paint for this kind of covert *rayado* because it was easy to carry hidden in one’s pocket, and it required no drying time. I want to emphasize that this was a *rayado*, not a mural; because of the violence, painted murals, no matter how quickly executed, were too dangerous to create.

The political violence forced the BRP and other muralist brigades into hiding for several years, resulting in an extreme low in production of street murals. Almost all UP-era murals were whitewashed by the military. This whitewashing is a physical manifestation of the military’s attempt to brainwash the public of its socialist past. By covering up the murals, they visualized the extent of their censorship and control over the Chilean people, inspiring in them a paralyzing fear (Chaffee’s concept of “psychopolitical” intimidation).

During Pinochet’s seventeen years in power, there were around 3,000 victims of murder or disappearance (Stern xxiii). 164 of these deaths were from “armed confrontations,” while the rest were through human rights violations (Valdivia Ortíz de Zárate, 188). Almost half of the murdered/disappeared victims – 46 percent – had no history of “political militancy” (Valdivia Ortíz de Zárate, 188).

Victims of torture add up to “dozens of thousands;” some even estimate over 100,000 (Stern, xxiii - xxii).

After 1977 the dictatorship went through a brief “repressive lull” as the Chilean military tried to clean up its international image after its members assassinated Orlando Letelier, former Foreign Minister and ambassador to the U.S. during the Allende administration. At the time of his murder, Letelier had been taking refuge in the United States after his imprisonment and torture by the right-wing Chilean military (Valdivia Ortíz de Zárate, 188; Evans 941; TNI). The slight lift in repression that occurred after the Letelier scandal may have contributed to the BRP’s official reorganization in 1980. The crumbling economy of 1982-83 also brought “serious and increasingly vocal opposition to the Pinochet regime” (Collier and Sater 376), which gave the BRP increased political momentum.

The stakes had risen. Before, the BRP fought for a just society of equals. The Frei administration’s occasional outbursts of police violence were nothing in comparison to the conditions of the dictatorship – now the BRP fought against the
government's systematic violation of human rights: against rape, torture, murder and forced disappearance. BRP protest rayados began to re-emerge with more frequency, touting phrases such as “Abajo Pinochet” (“Down with Pinochet”) and “Pinochet Asesino” (“Pinochet = Assassin”) (translated by the author; Zelada, Fernández, and Márquez, 21).

Other art activist groups took on the anti-Pinochet cause as well. In 1983, to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the coup d’etat, the group CADA (Colectivo Acciones de Arte – Art Actions Collective) began its “No +” (No más - No more) campaign. In this campaign, members of CADA wrote “No +” on the walls of the streets of Santiago, and invited the people of the community fill in the empty space (Figure 17). Examples include: “No + hunger,” “No + torture,” “No + fear,” and “No + dictatorship” (translated by the author, Neustadt 36). One person even completed the phrase with a drawing of a revolver. While this drawing transformed the rayado into a mural, most of the wall-paintings of the “No +” campaign are technically classified as rayados.

CADA also organized several street performances that enigmatically protested the dictatorship, such as a community-involved performance referencing the ½ litro de leche that Allende promised in his 40 medidas. One has to be careful when organizing public protest gatherings - in a country that does not value human rights, mass gatherings of peaceful protest are not effective, for protesters will simply be massacred: In 1983, the military responded with gunfire during “mass protests” (Valdivia Ortiz de Zárate) that were blatantly anti-Pinochet. By contrast, CADA was able to get away with their performance gatherings because of their cryptic qualities – only those who were “in the know” could understand their dissent. While enigma was beneficial in that it kept CADA members alive, it also limited public accessibility to meaning.

Even when considering all their other art actions, most CADA members have agreed that “No +” was their most effective campaign. The “No +” campaign represents the inverse of CADA’s performance philosophy. Here they chose to minimize performance visibility and maximize message comprehension. Instead of organizing people physically – forbidden and dangerous in a time of dictatorial
repression – CADA transformed the walls into a space for conversation and virtual coming-together.

“No +” provided a voice for those marginalized by the Pinochet regime (indicator 3) and gave evidence of the organized resistance (indicator 5) – street passersby who saw a “No +” image could instantly know that there was someone else out there who had their same fears and their same dreams. The invisible community dialogue fostered by the “No +” rayados inspired more people to get involved in the mural process (recruiting support, indicator 6). The action of filling in the phrase supported grassroots democracy - it heightened the participant’s sense of political efficacy by giving her the power to choose what to write (empowering citizens, indicator 8). The communication and behavioral changes caused by the rayados eventually turned the “No +” campaign into its own micro social movement.

Towards the end of the dictatorship, muralist brigades painted with less fear. A plebiscite took place in October 1988 that finally voted Pinochet out of office (Collier and Sater 380). Democratic presidential and congressional elections were planned for December 1989, and Pinochet finally left office in 1990. The BRP’s growing confidence can be seen in two murals from 1988 and 1990, both aiming to celebrate the victory and mobilize the people into action (see Figures 18 and 19). Figure 18 depicts the Chilean people fighting to recover their rights lost during the dictatorship, and the mural in Figure 19 demands freedom for political prisoners (Alcatruz Riquelme, 12). These murals serve historical memory and provide a voice for the marginalized, and also show organized resistance to Pinochet. It is significant that one of the murals was painted in 1988, the year of the plebiscite - it likely played a role in recruiting support (indicator 6) for the vote to take Pinochet out of power. After the return to democracy, Chilean mural brigades have continued to condemn the violence of the dictatorship, even into the 21st century14.

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14 In 2003, the all-female group Las Autónomas painted a mural on Ramona Parra street memorializing the assassination of the French priest André Jarlán Pourcel on September 4, 1984. His death has become a symbol of the many innocent people killed
The Brigada Ramona Parra’s influence has transcended Chile’s borders. In 1972, American muralist Eva Cockcroft traveled to Chile, where she interviewed and painted with the BRP (Cockcroft, Weber, and Cockcroft 188). Her visit was at the time of the BRP’s aesthetic peak: complete with flat colors and bold, gestural black outlines. Cockcroft returned to the U.S. inspired and formed her own New Jersey-based mural group, the People’s Painters, with an aesthetic style and work method highly influenced by the BRP. They were extremely concerned with maintaining equality within the collective. People’s Painters began as a women-only group; indeed, their focus on women’s empowerment is evident in their Women’s Center Mural (Figure 20).

In line with the BRP’s clandestine practice, the People’s Painters protested injustices through many “semilegal” murals done without permission, including what Cockcroft calls “political outdoor poster murals”– ephemeral protest murals in a graphic style (Cockcroft, Weber, and Cockcroft 186, 191). Shortly after the military coup in 1973, the People’s Painters re-created a section of the BRP’s Río Mapocho mural titled “No to Fascism” to show “solidarity with the Chilean resistance” in New York (Cockcroft, Weber, and Cockcroft 200). Figure 21 shows another ephemeral mural from that same year paying homage to Salvador Allende. It is being painted over one of their previous “poster murals” that had been defaced.

Cockcroft’s People’s Painters serves as a convenient segue from antiestablishment murals to the next section on community murals. Cockcroft includes her mural collective in her book, Toward A People’s Art (1977), which is considered as “one of the first comprehensive studies of the community mural movement” (Rosen and Fisher 101). Categorizing this antiestablishment group as a community mural as well reveals the difficulty in drawing distinctions between these two categories - in fact, many community mural movements start out as antiestablishment.

during the dictatorship (Alcatruz Riquelme 10). Las Autónomas murals continue to condemn current torture such as domestic violence against women (Alcatruz Riquelme 12).
Like Eva Cockcroft, I also took inspiration from the BRP’s fight for social justice and incorporated it into a mural project in the United States. In contrast to Cockcroft, however, the community mural I organized was not completed through an antiestablishment practice, but rather in collaboration with existing institutions in Cold Spring. I further explain my reasons for this choice of practice in the section on the Cold Spring Mural.

**COMMUNITY MURALS**

“*Porque el mural es una forma de arte público, es un arte verdaderamente democrático, pertenece a todos, y cada persona que lo ve se siente con el derecho de participar, comentar, criticar o gozarlo.*”\(^{15}\) ~ Arnold Belkin  (Belkin 107-108).

Community muralism is a collective phenomenon in which the community is highly involved in the design brainstorming and painting processes. A local sense of place is an especially important factor in community murals; historically, they have often occurred in low-income neighborhoods and been headed by leaders of marginalized racial or cultural groups (Cockcroft, Weber, and Cockcroft 11). Community murals, as it may be guessed by their name, also have strong local community support - either from a grassroots network of individuals or a non-governmental organization – although community murals are not necessarily antiestablishment, the government usually shies away from funding community murals (Cockcroft, Weber, and Cockcroft 11-12).

Community muralism originated during the 1960s and 70s as part of the civil rights movement in the United States (Rosen and Fisher 100). In her book, *Towards a People's Art*, Eva Cockcroft cites the first expression as *Wall of Respect* (1967), painted by an African American community in Chicago to celebrate Black Pride.

\(^{15}\) “Because the mural is a form of public art, it is a truly democratic art, it belongs to everyone, and everyone that sees it feels the right to participate, comment, criticize, or enjoy it” (translated by the author).
(Cockcroft, Weber, and Cockcroft 9-10). The social activism by African Americans inspired Mexican-Americans to organize as well; they looked back to their indigenous roots and started calling themselves Chicanos, a new political name for their ethnic pride. As part of their activism, Chicanos soon began creating their own murals in inner-city barrios with the goal of improving their quality of life and celebrating their unique cultural identity.

It is significant to note that Chicano political activism peaked between 1969 and 1975, exactly when Chicano mural production was at its highest (Rosen and Fisher 101). This correlation suggests that the murals played a major role in promoting the social changes that Chicanos were seeking. Chicano Park, in Barrio Logan of San Diego, California, represents one of the successful grassroots community mural movements that occurred during this very politically active period.

**Chicano Park**

For the first half of the twentieth century, Barrio Logan was known as Logan Heights, a respectable, upper middle-class town with a large Mexican population (Rosen and Fisher 92). Logan Heights’ demise began in 1950, when the city of San Diego re-zoned the area from residential to industrial, adding junkyards that destroyed the community environment and forced many families to leave their homes. To make matters worse, in the 1960s Interstate Highway 5 was built, separating Barrio Logan from the rest of Logan Heights, essentially segregating the Mexican-Americans from the whites. To top it all off, in 1967-1969, CalTrans (California Department of Transportation) built the Coronado Bridge that cut the Barrio in half, destroying community cohesion (Rosen and Fisher 94).

Nevertheless, several community members saw potential for a silver lining in these thick, grey clouds of concrete. Around 1967, they took their ideas to the city council to ask for permission to build a park underneath the highway and Coronado Bridge. This request was granted consideration, but after months of meetings, the council still had not given a clear answer. In 1970, it was made known that the city of San Diego was planning to construct a California Highway Patrol station – on exactly the same site that the Chicanos had asked for a park. The Chicano
community, furious at their betrayal, began to organize. On April 22, 1970, they initiated an official occupation of the land in protest, forming human chains around bulldozers and planting flowers for their park (Chicano Park). After twelve days of occupation, the San Diego city council finally agreed to negotiate with the newly formed Chicano Park Steering Committee, which resulted in the creation of Chicano Park (Chicano Park).

Many of the key leaders that organized the occupation of the park were artists, including Salvador “Queso” Torres, often referred to as the “architect of the dream” (Cockcroft 83). Torres and the other artists had plans to make murals to beautify the park and consecrate it as Chicano territory. These murals were part of a bigger plan to create a Chicano cultural center for “preserving and discovering their traditional culture” (Cockcroft 83). This cultural center, Centro Cultural de la Raza, was established in 1971.

One of the strongest indicators of social change for the Chicano Park murals is their transforming of the meaning of space. The Park’s murals accomplished this by reasserting Chicano control over the land that they lost. The park is located in the promised land of Aztlán that belonged to the Chicanos’ Aztec ancestors, land annexed by the United States in 1848 (González, 44). The murals also transformed the ugly, abandoned area under the highway into a majestic representation of Chicano art and culture. Due to the murals, the space has become a place for public gatherings and celebrations: every year near April 22 (the day when the Park was won) Chicanos come together beneath the murals to celebrate Chicano Park Day.

The first murals appeared in 1973-74, and were painted by two art collectives: Los Toltecas en Aztlan and El Congreso de Artistas Chicanos en Aztlan, which focused on la raza (the race, indigenous) pride (Rosen and Fisher, 103). On March 23, 1973 over 300 community members painted alongside the art collectives at a “community ‘paint-in,’” (Cockcroft 87). The murals from this day were made with nearly no pre-planning – community members with little artistic training were set loose to paint spontaneously on the wall. Cockcroft comments that the only reason this wild mural practice was mildly successful was because of the “intensity of the Chicano movement at that time” (Cockcroft 87). Such “graffiti murals”
increased non-artist participation in painting, but sacrificed aesthetics and clarity of message (Cockcroft 89). Fortunately, the mural process eventually became much more organized.

This representation of Chicano culture *celebrates a common cultural identity*, promoting cultural autonomy. Murals depict symbols important for Chicano culture, such as the *Virgen de Guadalupe* (1978) a highly revered icon in Mexican and Chicano culture (Figure 22). Muralist Mario Torero depicts la Virgen with indigenous features, which helps the Chicano viewer to identify with her even more. However, her traditionally passive posture fails to empower Chicanas (Chicano women).

Much of the *common cultural identity* is also achieved through *recording historical memory*, including murals with pre-Columbian themes, Mexican history, and their more recent Chicano history. *Tree of Life* (1974) takes the viewer back to the ancient Aztec paradise, Tamoanchan (Figure 23). According to legend, Tamoanchan is the place of origin for the Mexican people, and the place where Quetzalcoatl buried the bones of the ancestors (Robles). From these bones, the new race – Chicanos - would be born. In the mural a fetus is cradled in the branches of a tree, symbolizing the new race being nurtured by the earth and the bones of its ancestors. It is said that this mural is dedicated to Chicano students, the next generation of *la raza* (Robles), imploring them never to forget their “roots.”

Many murals recorded Mexican history and culture. One particularly significant mural with this theme is *Los Grandes y Frida* (Figure 24). It celebrates *los tres grandes*, renowned muralists of the Mexican School: Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros. Frida Kahlo, another outstanding Mexican painter and muralist, is also honored, which is empowering for women, especially women artists. The veneration of these Mexican muralists in a park celebrating Chicano identity reveals the great legacy that the Mexican School left on the United States’ Chicano mural movement. Anglo-Americans’ recognition of these fine artists from Mexico is an example of the transculturation and racial/cultural integration that helps the Chicanos to belong in the dominant U.S. culture.
Chicano cultural identity is also evident in murals recording relatively recent Chicano history. Murals celebrated Chicano heroes such as César Chávez, leader of the United Farm Workers Union (UFW) in the 1960s (Figure 25; Cockcroft 88; González 176-77). Beyond promoting Chicanos’ cultural autonomy, the representation of Chávez symbolized the social struggles for which he fought: “the right to unionize, the right to vote, and the right to basic government services like schools, public housing,” etc. (González 176). Through grassroots organizing, Chávez was able to further Chicano political autonomy and achieve goals that worked towards economic equality for the working-class. Due to his activism, Chávez is “the most admired Hispanic leader in the country” (González 177).

While the murals provided a public voice for the marginalized Chicano culture, some also served to provide a distinctive voice for Chicanas (Chicano women), a marginalized group within Chicanos. Chicana artist Yolanda López, expressed frustration at male control during the early stages of mural production. The women of the Royal Chicano Air Force art collective made a feminist statement in 1975 when they arrived a week earlier than their male counterparts and began painting on their own (Cockcroft, Weber, and Cockcroft 91). The mural they created, The Women Hold Up The Universe (Female Inteligencia) presented an empowering visual message for women as well (Figure 26). Nine women are depicted as protagonists; six of them support the clouds in their hands; two play the flute, and one is a mother holding her child in her arms. The mural glorifies woman for the unending work that she must do to keep the universe in motion.

In 1978, Yolanda Lopez approached another feminist mural with a different kind of mural practice. That year, a group of young high school girls had asked a male Chicano artist to help them paint a mural, only to be rejected. López harnessed her feminist fury and volunteered her assistance to the girls, careful to remove herself from the painting action and act simply as a facilitator and mentor for the developing artists and political activists (Chicano Park). I am very appreciative of López’s choice of mural practice in this case. She promoted women’s empowerment by allowing these young girls to be fully immersed in a project that they directed themselves. By letting the girls determine the content, she followed Paolo Freire’s
empowerment principle of dialogic communication for raising consciousness on social issues (Rogers and Singhal, 70).

The product of this collaboration was a mural titled *Preserve Our Heritage* (Figure 27). It focused on issues relevant to teenage girls, such as societal pressures related to women's appearance. To challenge this norm, one girl told a T.V. interviewer, she painted herself as a strong indigenous woman *without* makeup (*Chicano Park*). The girl's painting and statement both reflect an empowered young woman, one who didn't need to conform to the societal norms of the dominant U.S. culture. The publicity the mural received gave the young muralists a chance to *influence the mass media* (indicator 4) with their fight for Chicana empowerment and cultural autonomy.

*Preserve Our Heritage* was part of the third mural phase of Chicano Park (1977-1981). This phase marked “a resurgence in community pride” (Rosen and Fisher 103), and many of these murals recruited popular support for a cause (indicator 6). *Hasta la Bahía!!* (1978, Figure 28), for example, was part of the Park’s campaign to re-conquer more lost land and open up the park to the bay. After years of campaigning, the bay was finally conquered in 1987. New murals continued to be painted throughout the 1980s and 90s, though there were fewer due to increased bureaucracy. In 1984, the Chicano Park Arts Committee was formed to help maintain existing murals, which, after about ten years or so, began to need touch-ups.

The afterlife and upkeep of these murals are a significant part of the mural process; “maintenance involves the city, the people of the barrio, and especially the artists, who are continuing to work on the pillars of the bridge” (Rosen and Fisher 107). The first official restoration project took place in 1991, when the city’s Commission for Arts and Culture donated $60,000 to complete repairs on eleven murals (Pérez). CalTrans, the agency that built the bridge and highways, trained artists in restoration skills (Rosen and Fisher 104). The government and institutional support is evidence of transculturation, as the dominant white culture of San Diego recognized Chicano Park as an important part of their city.
Anglo support and cultural integration is also evident in the 2001 post-earthquake seismic retrofit project on the Coronado Bridge. CalTrans recognized that the traditional way of fixing the bridge would have covered the murals in concrete, and showed their support for the Park by taking great pains to develop an alternative repair method. Gary Gallegos, CalTrans District 11 Director, declared, “the murals must be protected at all costs” (qtd. in Rosen and Fisher, 108).16 The murals had truly become part of San Diego’s new identity and social system: as a result of this project, Mark Rosen and James Fisher, associated with CalTrans, even found the murals “eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places” and the California Register of Historical Resources (Rosen and Fisher 92).

Significant national government recognition and support distinguishes Chicano Park from most other community mural movements. In 2011, after eleven years of bureaucratic negotiations, a federal grant of $1.6 million was finally implemented for a massive mural restoration project (Pérez). Ricardo Duffy, one of the project’s directors, remarks with amazement at the level of cooperation between CalTrans and the Chicano Park Steering Committee (CPSC), “It was the first time Caltrans had ever done anything like this. It never happens. To push this through the bureaucracy is an accomplishment in itself” (qtd. in Pérez). Despite delays from bureaucratic red tape, this kind of collaboration illustrates the growing level of racial/cultural integration that the murals of Chicano Park have helped to develop. The restoration began in June 2011, and, as of February 2012, eleven murals have been restored (Official Chicano Park Day Website).

Chicano Park is a stunning example of how murals can be an integral part of social movements with long-term success. Following Everett M. Rogers’ stages of social movements, Chicano Park started by protesting the system, but then eventually became an established organization in a new, altered social system. Chicano Park’s successful alteration of the Anglo-dominated system and integration into a new system is evidence of the racial and cultural integration that it has

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16 It is also significant to note that the last name “Gallegos” is of Hispanic origin, which suggests that Latinos have now become integrated into CalTrans, the corporation that once had an antagonistic relationship with Chicano Park.
effected. The muralists’ inspiring vision combined with organizers’ administrative skills formed a perfect partnership to create sustainable social change that has lasted for over forty years.

El Colectivo Brigada Ramona Parra

When I returned to Chile for two weeks in December 2011/January 2012, I had the opportunity to meet two original members of the Brigada Ramona Parra: Alejandro “Mono” Gonzalez and Juan “Chin Chin” Tralma. Through interviewing both Mono, who has separated from the group, and Chin Chin, who remains the group coordinator, I discovered how the BRP has changed since the 1970s. Because of its shift in mural practice I am able to include some of the group’s contemporary works in the section on Community Murals.

Shortly after Pinochet left office in 1990, the Brigada Ramona Parra began to regroup for a third time. Exiled members came back from abroad to join with those who stayed fighting the “lucha callejera” (street struggle) by painting protest rayados. This new group became the Colectivo BRP, a muralist collective that is no longer associated with the Communist Party as before. In contrast to the BRP’s clandestine protest murals of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, the Colectivo BRP often paints with a community-style mural practice. The BRP’s work has always been collective, but the murals of the Collective take collaboration to the next level by increasing the participation of community members. This shift in mural practice is significant because it shows that the BRP members, always rebelling against social injustice, recognize the power of collaborative community mural practice to create social change in the context of democracy.

This spirit of rebellion translates to the Colectivo BRP’s philosophy of art. Through their collaborative, community mural practice they fight against the elite art world, which they feel excludes them for being working-class citizens. Chin Chin comments: “... no nos interesa meter en el tema de los artistas, de elite... [Para]
Chin Chin believes that graffiti is worth more than elite art, because graffiti carries the strong social message of the pueblo. This feeling of exclusion from and rebellion against the traditional art world is commonly observed among community muralists in the United States as well (Cockcroft, Weber, and Cockcroft 11).

Chin Chin doesn’t believe in the concept of “the artist,” because for him “the artist” is intrinsically elite. The brigadistas don’t consider themselves artists, but rather “trabajadores de arte” (workers of art): “Yo tengo sexto preparatorio, yo sigo siendo un obrero... yo no me siento artista – yo pinto, yo ensucio muros... Nosotros somos ensuciadores de muros” (Tralma, Personal Interview). Although Chin Chin jokingly calls himself a “wall-dirtier,” he is really believes in the dignity of his work. From this notion he invents a new definition of arte popular, or popular art, as the honest and dignified labor of the working class – whether that be a mother’s meal, a fisherman’s catch, etc.

Members of the Colectivo live in solidarity with other workers, and they invite these workers to paint with them as equals. Sometimes they also act as mentors for child volunteers. One example of their more recent collaborative murals is the mural in the headquarters of Un Techo Para Chile (UTPCH - A Roof for Chile), a non-profit organization that builds homes for the needy. UTPCH provided the space and painting materials, for the mural, which was executed with the help of children from several of UTPCH’s encampments in the Santiago area. The mural was completed in January 2011, and I visited it in January 2012.

Chin Chin explained the mural’s process: during the course of ten days, the children attended workshops organized by the Colectivo. In these workshops, they drew their ideas for a mural: their personal stories of the neighborhood and their hopes for its future (Figures 29 and 30). From these drawings the Colectivo

17 “...we’re not interested in the topic of artists, the elite. [For] us, the fight is in how we are supporting graffiti...” (translated by the author).

18 “I have a sixth grade education, I remain a worker... I don’t feel like an artist – I paint, I dirty walls... We are wall-dirtiers” (translated by the author).
designed the final sketch and transferred the outline to the wall for the children to fill in with color (Figure 31). Finally, the Colectivo members finished with the details (Tralma, Personal Interview). In this way, the Colectivo made sure that the mural was aesthetically unified, and that it clearly portrayed their message. This shows that even participatory artwork with a goal of grassroots democracy needs organized leadership to function.

Involving the children in the brainstorming and painting processes empowered them as citizens by increasing their sense of social efficacy (indicator 8). It helps them to identify with the mural, especially when they see the images based on their own designs. In this way the UTPCH mural process is a superb example of dialogical communication between the Colectivo BRP and the children, which, in accordance with Melucci’s three characteristics of a social movement, helped to create “group solidarity” and define the “conflict” that the mural was to address. Being part of a big community project like this also gave the young volunteers a taste of the practical experience necessary to organize their own similar projects in the future. This kind of youth empowerment promotes grassroots democracy.

Although Chin Chin is passionate about “la lucha callejera,” this mural is inside a privately owned building. Because interior murals – especially private ones – generally have much less visibility than street murals, I asked Chin Chin if he thought that interior murals had less of a social impact. He responded that it didn’t matter the location, what mattered was the message. I do not completely agree with this, but it is true that this interior mural’s message alters the tone of the private room. The mural transforms the meaning of space (indicator 1) by bringing poor children’s dreams inside the official UTPCH headquarters (Figure 32). This room is where UTPCH holds press conferences and other important meetings; when leaders are debating a pressing issue, the images of the population they serve remind them of their organization’s goal: to provide homes for those that need them. This promotes the social progress goal of economic equality.

Another indicator of social change for the UTPCH mural is that it records the historical memory of the children’s neighborhood. In this way, the historical
memory also provides a voice for the marginalized poor and expresses their hopes for the future. Figures, 33, 34, and 35 show the three mural panels. The first panel emphasizes four monumental female figures: a young woman freeing a bird, a musician playing the guitar, a mother carrying a baby in her arms, and a student brandishing a pencil in her left fist. These women represent a few of the many roles a woman may have in Chilean society, similar to the way The Women Hold Up The Universe portrays Chicanas. While the design honors these traditional female roles, it is especially empowering for women to see themselves depicted as zealous students with great potential for successful careers. It would have been even more empowering had the Colectivo’s design included a woman working alongside the male construction worker, breaking gender stereotypes.

Figure 34 shows the second panel, where more of the design came from the children’s drawings. Some elements to highlight include: a family standing in front of their home, a young boy studying, and a piggy bank. The piggy bank is significant because it specifically speaks to children, reminding them to start practicing good saving habits now in order to achieve their future dreams. The most important symbol of this panel is the book. Besides the image of the boy studying, the book also appears as the foundation for a home and as a pseudo-apartment building. This serves as a metaphor, saying that through learning, we build our futures.

The last panel is more generalized; it doesn’t reflect so much the children’s neighborhood so much as it represents the work of UTPCH and Un Techo Para Mi País (international organization, part of UTPCH). The cordillera (mountain range), however, may be found in the children’s original sketches. The man with the hammer seems to represent the dignity of the worker, but it is unusual that he – along with the two other figures in the panel – is blonde, while most Chileans have darker coloring. The result is that Chileans are less likely to identify with this panel, which weakens its message. Although racial integration is promoted in the multicolored skin tones of the fist holding wheat, including multiracial figures interacting with the blondes would have strengthened this pro-diversity message.

The mural, as a whole, aims to promote Latin America’s cultural autonomy. This is done through the references to Un Techo Para Mi País (UTPMP), including
the organization logo and the roofs painted with the flags of the eighteen countries it serves in Latin America (Interview, Chin Chin). This creates a common cultural identity (indicator 7) and solidarity between Chile and other Latin American countries. As sociologists Laraña, Johnston, and Gusfield note, collective identity/solidarity is the first step in organizing a social movement (New Social, 10). The next step is defining the conflict, or cause. This mural defines that international conflict/cause as the lack of housing for the poor, and through the creation of a collective identity, it aims to recruit popular support for that cause (indicator 6). The problem is, as this mural is inside a private building, the only way its message can reach the broad population it seeks to unite is through publicity by the mass media (indicator 4), the very entity that the BRP was created to fight against.

After searching an international newspaper database, I found that the UTPCH mural has appeared in at least six Chilean newspaper articles (NewsBank). Four of these briefly announced the mural’s inauguration in a list of many other events. Two short articles had the mural as their focus (“UTPCH”). These articles may widen the mural’s sphere of influence in Chile.

More importantly publicity-wise, UTPCH also published their own article to their website, along with a photograph of a group of youth volunteers in front of the finished mural (Figure 36). In a sense, the mural has come to serve as the face of the organization. UTPCH is known internationally, and thus this online article will reach the desired international audience more effectively than can the Chilean newspapers.

Due to the mass media, the Colectivo BRP today has gained international prestige, owing in part to the exiled members who painted in Europe during the Pinochet dictatorship. The group has been invited to paint murals in Argentina, Holland, Belgium, and Ireland, to name a few countries. Even in their international murals, the Colectivo often engages local residents in a community process. Authors and scholars have taken a particular interest in the BRP: Chin Chin showed me a pile of books on muralism in multiple languages that discuss the BRP, and mentioned his large collection of numerous BRP theses for which he was interviewed - including one from Harvard.
Despite all this positive publicity, Chin Chin still is skeptical of the mass media: "Porque, el publicista hoy día está metido en Internet... tenemos una gran pelea por el rol de imagen..."19 (Tralma, Personal Interview). The Colectivo BRP puts their own images on the Internet – a good way to widen their audience – and as a result has been a victim of copyright infringement - companies use their mural designs without permission to advertise their own for-profit ventures. While this is deplorable, it does at least reveal the power of the Colectivo BRP’s images and their influence on Chilean popular culture.

So while the Colectivo BRP may work to counter the dominant mass media, influencing the media has helped to spread the Colectivo’s message and expand their painting to other countries. The Colectivo BRP, through its international prestige, has now become an established organization with greater power for making social change around the world. I am particularly drawn to their community style murals, which take advantage of the BRP’s clean, graphic style to increase the participation of non-artists and community members. Like Chicano Park muralists, who collaborated with the government and institutions of San Diego, BRP muralists have formed partnerships with non-profits such as Un Techo Para Chile to create an international network of sustainable support for their cause.

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19 “Because, today’s publicist is on the Internet... we have a great struggle due to the role of the image” [in advertising] (translated by the author).
MY EXPERIENCE WITH THE COLD SPRING MURAL

“I derive my theory from my painting.
Theory emerges from what one is actually doing”

~ Siqueiros, (cited in Folgarait, Mural 97)

Social Context and Preliminary Discussions

The Latino community in Cold Spring is growing rapidly. It comprises 7.1 percent of the city’s population, according to the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau. This is a substantial increase from 2000, when Cold Spring’s total Latino population was at a mere 1.3 percent (2000 U.S. Census Bureau). This 7.1 percent also represents a considerably greater concentration of Latinos in Cold Spring than the 2.8 percent in the whole of Stearns County. About 77 percent of Cold Spring Latinos today are of Mexican descent.

To help incorporate the growing Latino population into Cold Spring culture, Casa Guadalupe Multicultural Community (CGMC) was formed in 1995. CGMC is a non-profit organization that works towards improving the lives of Latinos – both recent immigrants and long-term residents – in the Central Minnesota area. According to CGMC, social change for Latinos in Cold Spring involves “empower[ing] them to be socially, economically, and civically engaged in their communit[y]” (Casa Guadalupe Multicultural Communities). CGMC seeks acceptance, integration and community representation for Latinos. I consider CGMC a social movement, a collective force for positive social change in Cold Spring.

If it were not for CGMC, there would be no Cold Spring Mural. Before CGMC agreed to be my official partner for this mural project, I checked for interest in other organizations that served Latinos. One of these organizations had reservations about working with someone not of Latina heritage. I am very grateful that CGMC, in contrast, was from the beginning very open to the idea of collaborating with me, an Anglo woman, in the mural project.
In February and March of 2011, I began conversations with Mayuli Bales, director of CGMC. Bales told me that many of the Mexican American children and youth of Cold Spring did not know about their culture’s rich artistic traditions - many had never even been to an art museum. One important goal of our project, then, was to introduce the youth to some of the great Mexican muralists. Beyond presenting the youth with images of Mexican muralism, both Bales and I wanted to empower the youth by helping them leave their own mark on the town. This led to an idea for an interactive workshop: when looking at themes that the Mexican muralists discussed, the youth could begin to reflect on how the murals related to their personal stories, and what parts of these stories they might want to display on a public wall. From there we would guide them in visualizing who they were and what they had to say to the community.

As the conversations between Bales and I developed, we also discussed possible themes for the mural. I remember distinctly how she spoke of Cold Spring leaders’ plans to become a “five-star town” by visually celebrating their German heritage as part of a new community design plan. She thought that to complement this, it would be fitting to create a mural about Latino heritage to give Latinos a visual presence in the community dominated by Germans.

I first interpreted Bales’s comments to mean that she wanted the mural to focus only on Latino culture, to make the community stand out in the highly German town of Cold Spring. This assertion of cultural pride was what I had observed in other Chicano U.S. murals I had studied. However, Bales clarified that what the Latino community in Cold Spring really needed was to belong. She wanted the mural to let the Anglos in the community know that yes, Latinos were Americans too, and yes, they had a history in this town just like everyone else. A mural that ignored the Anglo majority of Cold Spring’s population would only have further isolated Latinos. Thus, the mural was not to be only for the Latinos, rather it was to be painted by them as a gift to the wider community. As time went on, this plan was also adjusted to be more inclusive of non-Latino participants.

When Bales first expressed interest in creating a mural about Cold Spring history, I was a bit dubious. I had been inspired by the socially audacious murals of
the BRP and the Chicano movement - in comparison, all the historical murals that I had seen in the Midwest frankly seemed uninteresting. I was concerned that a mural with a historical theme would not only fail to send out a strong social message, but would acquiesce to the status quo. I saw historical murals as “diabetic art” – Mexican School muralist José Clemente Orozco’s term for art that is sugary, decorative, and cheerful, but lacking in social significance (translated by the author; Orozco, 72). At the same time, I recognized that a historical mural would be attractive to the city government and potential wall donors, and that it would help incorporate Latinos into the town’s historical memory. As I thought about it more, I began to get excited about how I could infuse the historical mural model with a fresh new perspective. I soon discovered that a historical mural was capable of much more social power than I had imagined.

Navigating the Bureaucracy

In early May, I contacted Cold Spring’s city government to propose our idea for a mural and to make sure that it would be permitted by the city. The response I received from a city official was polite but not promising. He told me that it was extremely unlikely that a mural would fit within the city’s strict design standards, and he didn’t want me to risk wasting time or money.

A few days later, I was lucky enough to be able to meet with the official at his office. In person he seemed much more interested, even enthused, about the project, showing me some artwork he did himself. The official said he was willing to work with me to see if we could find an appropriate spot for the mural. When I told him that the mural was to incorporate the Latino community, he suggested that perhaps I look into putting the mural inside Cold Spring’s Gold N’ Plump plant. That was a place full of ethnic diversity, and would receive a lot of foot traffic, he reasoned.

Later when I mentioned the city administrator’s suggestion to CGMC, Raquel Gudiel, assistant director of CGMC, commented that if it were inside the Gold N’ Plump factory, no one besides the workers would see it. This would not further our goal of giving Latinos a visual presence in the wider community. I agreed with
Gudiel that Gold N’ Plump was definitely not the best option, but it was a start, and at least we already had a local leader on our side.

In the meantime, on May 12, 2011, I presented my idea to the Cold Spring Chamber of Commerce, in search of a business-owner interested in hosting the mural on his or her wall. Thanks to Bales’s advice on how to focus the presentation on the Chamber of Commerce’s business interests, it was a success. I introduced the project as “Drawing on Cold Spring,” for the play on words that fit the concept of a community mural – we were to draw on community resources for design ideas, and then literally draw the design on a building in Cold Spring. I explained how murals could beautify run-down buildings, attract customers, and create a friendly community atmosphere.

Because I wanted to ensure that the mural painting would be an empowering experience for the Latinos of Cold Spring, I originally stated that I would paint the mural with “the community of Casa Guadalupe.” However, I was careful to later clarify that other Cold Spring community members would be allowed to paint as well. This mural was, after all, to unite Latinos in Cold Spring with the wider, dominantly Anglo, community.

After I finished my presentation, and opened up for questions, one woman commented on the idealistic spirit of my message (paraphrased): “A lot of us get caught up in the business of everyday life, but you made us pause and imagine the possibility of something new and different.” Another kind woman gave me names of people to contact. A week later, I was made aware that the Chamber had passed a motion of support for the mural. Drawing on Cold Spring had now gotten off to a solid start in its journey through the bureaucracy.

On Monday, May 23, 2011, I presented Drawing on Cold Spring to the city’s Planning Commission. I showed examples of murals in nearby towns and explained how murals promoted Cold Spring’s mission. At the end of my presentation I was met with immediate support from the Planning Commission Chair. He interpreted the idea of a mural as exempt from Cold Spring’s strict design standards. The mayor, however, disagreed; in his view, a mural would indeed conflict with the design standards. He was not against the project, but he felt that the Planning
Commission needed to establish in writing a clearer policy that would permit a mural.

The conversation even went so far as the question of the definition of art and “good” art. How would the Planning Commission create standards for a mural’s artistic quality? One woman expressed concern that this mural would lead to a slippery slope where people would feel free to paint whatever they wanted on their walls, even if it were ugly or offensive. Another commission member responded to this concern by saying that it was a matter of taste: he was personally a fan of Picasso, who had painted some strange pictures. “Who are we to judge what is and what is not art?” he questioned.

At the end of this discussion, the Chair amended his initial statement of approval to be conditional; I was to research mural ordinances in other towns so that the Planning Commission would have examples to use as reference when creating their own policy. We would meet again in June to make the final decision.

I then spent the next few weeks doing legal research on mural ordinances in Minnesota. I found Minneapolis's definition of a mural to be the most clear:

"Mural. A work of graphic art painted on a building wall, which contains no commercial advertising or logos, and which does not serve to advertise or promote any business, product, activity, service, interest or entertainment" (Minneapolis Zoning Code, section 520.160).

I also appreciated Long Prairie’s definition of a mural and the legal steps for making one:

"Exterior walls must be free of graffiti and advertising except as allowed by the Chapter 16.510 – 16.519, Sign Regulations, of this Code...... (5) Murals painted or applied to a building require a sign permit and an artist’s conception of the painting." (Ordinances – Long Prairie - Minnesota, 15. 206, 16.513).

As I was doing legal research I was also beginning to draft sketches for the mural. I was creating these designs for the space we finally found in early June: Dan Kippley, owner of Cold Spring Cleaner’s Laundromat, agreed to donate the use of his
long, westward-facing wall (Figure 37). I had to keep in mind, however, that the mural might have to be a temporary, transportable mural on canvas if we could not get city permission for a permanent one.

One Anglo city official recommended that I not show the Planning Commission my sketches until after we had determined that it was legally permissible to paint a mural. They felt that it was not government’s place to determine content of a privately owned mural. They also expressed deep concern that the Latino content of the mural might stir up racial tension for some Commission members, causing them to feel uncomfortable and vote against the idea of a mural altogether.

The official’s concerns were not without warrant; I experienced the racial and cultural tensions over the mural’s design when another prominent member of the Anglo community asked me how committed I was to incorporating the Latino community and culture into the mural design. They worried that I might place a huge emphasis on the Latino culture at the expense of Cold Spring’s German history. In response, I responded that I was very committed to the Latino community; it was indeed a central part of my project, but that in the mural I was aiming for a balance between the two cultures.

On June 27, I presented again to the Planning Commission on my research of mural ordinances from Minneapolis, Long Prairie, Stillwater, and Red Wing. Towns I researched that had murals but no mural ordinances included: St. Paul, Menahga, Little Falls, Avon, Elk River, Rochester, and New Ulm. Stillwater and Red Wing were excellent examples because they are thriving, historic towns that Cold Spring would like to emulate; Stillwater’s ordinance was especially attractive to one Planning Commission member due to its requirement that all murals follow a historic theme.

Before the post-presentation discussion got too far, the city administrator pulled out a thick blue book. He told me that my research (which I had sent him in an email the day before) had inspired him to do some more digging into Cold Spring’s design standards, and that... Cold Spring had always allowed murals! The regulations are as follows:

Non-commercial art. Any outdoor artwork, mural, sculpture and the like may be displayed on a lot, provided that it does not contain any commercial message or logo
and does not create a sight visibility hazard, and is not of
an obscene nature as defined by the United States Supreme Court. Where such
outdoor art is part of a Site that is subject to the Planning Commission's
jurisdiction, the outdoor art shall be considered part of the development
that is subject to the Planning Commission's review and approval (City of Cold Spring
Zoning Ordinance, Section 17 General Regulations, Subdivision 11 Sign Regulations,
Part 13 Exemptions, Sub part t).

The obstacles to obtaining permission for the mural reveal the underlying
racial tensions existing in Cold Spring at the time. Such subtle racial tensions are
not uncommon in small-town Minnesota, where floods of immigrants often come for
menial jobs in factories such as meat processing plants and dairy farms. Starting
with low pay from these basic jobs, it takes a while for immigrants and their families
to move up the social ladder. In the case of Cold Spring, financial concerns drive
many recent Latino immigrants to live in Town’s Edge Homes trailer park. Living in
this park, which is separated from downtown by Highway 23, spatially segregates
residents from the rest of Cold Spring and thus impedes the integration of these
Latinos into Cold Spring culture.

I was told the story of one Cold Spring resident who said that this kind of
mural about diversity had to have been proposed by a white person; if a Mexican
muralist approached the town – the Chamber of Commerce, the Planning
Commission, the wall owner – with the same idea, it would not have passed. After
pondering this story in relation to my own experience, I must agree to at least some
extent – if not impossible, it would at least have been much more difficult for a
Latino to propose a mural project in Cold Spring.

One reason for this is that there are no Latino members in the Chamber of
Commerce, Planning Commission, or City Council. I was non-threatening to the
Anglo community because I myself am Anglo. In this sense, I became a bridge
between the Anglo and Latino cultures. Now the mural serves as that bridge – after
Drawing on Cold Spring, I suspect that it will be easier for ethnically diverse artists
to push new public art projects through the Planning Commission.
Determining Mural Practice: Degrees of Collaboration

“The style should be a consequence of the social function”

“To such an audience, such an art”

- David Alfaro Siqueiros (qtd. in Folgarait, So Far 36)

Because I view the process of mural making as an essential ingredient in a mural’s social impact, it is important to discuss the reasons for choosing the type of practice that I did. My research on state-sponsored muralism of the Mexican School, antiestablishment murals of the Brigada Ramona Parra, and community murals of Chicano culture helped to guide me in my choice. I was also guided by my assessment of Cold Spring’s social context.

The elite Mexican School muralists worked individually with teams of nameless helpers. Although Bales was drawn to the aesthetics of these muralists, their mural practice was not fitting for the social change that we wanted to accomplish in Cold Spring. While this style of muralism does communicate a message with the aim of creating behavioral/social change, it employs top-down communication. Top-down communication does not empower those on the receiving end. We were looking to empower youth and community members, and so a dialogical communication process would be necessary.

The Brigada Ramona Parra used dialogical communication to empower their group members, but they came short of involving the wider community in this conversation. Furthermore, although I find the Brigada Ramona Parra’s style of mural practice to be socially empowering for its members in the context of Chile’s Unidad Popular and Pinochet dictatorship, this brigade model would not have been socially successful for Cold Spring youth. Organizing such clandestine and illegal wall painting in Cold Spring would have put some painters at risk for arrest, or even deportation, depending on their immigration status - definitely not supporting any of our goals for positive social change.

Because Cold Spring, M.N. provided a similar social context to that of other Chicano community murals in the U.S., I opted for a Chicano-mural-inspired collaborative practice. This would create the dialogical communication necessary to
empower volunteers and other community members, thereby achieving CGMC’s goals. My conversations with Minneapolis muralist Gustavo Lira also influenced my process.

In the Cold Spring mural, it was imperative to work as a team; even if it were physically possible for me to design and paint the mural entirely by myself, the result would have been meaningless to the community. The nature of the collaboration in the Cold Spring Mural process was defined by: direct input from community members for the design; representation of the Latino community’s history and dreams through CGMC director Mayuli Bales and Raquel Gudiel; direct community action in painting; and my own synthesis of all the input to help guide the creation of a cohesive whole.

**My Autonomy as an Artist**

While Chin Chin and the Colectivo BRP consider themselves “workers of art,” I have always considered myself an artist. My role as an artist in the Cold Spring Mural was to synthesize all the community input into a unified design. The mural design is my own artwork, drawn by my hand. Once we started tracing the design onto the wall, however, the mural’s character began to change. My artistic individuality needed to dissolve a bit for the community’s collective voice to shine through.

Throughout the painting process, I often felt like the conductor of an orchestra: mixing paint, moving scaffolding, and pointing volunteers in the right direction. In the role of a conductor, control is somewhat removed – the musicians being directed are the ones actually playing the music. In addition to my role as a conductor, as the artistic leader it was my job to make sure that the mural looked like a unified work of art when finished. At times this goal seemed to conflict with involving volunteers in the painting.

I asked Gustavo Lira for advice on the issue of aesthetic beauty vs. community participation. He told me that in his experience working with youth, he guides them in their painting to a certain extent. If a volunteer struggles and can never get the image quite right, it was okay to paint over it for the good of the mural
as a whole. I did this in some cases, but in others, such as the merry-go-round scene, it seemed more important to let go of control and leave the amateur expression as it was.

As Eva Cockcroft eloquently explains, “there is a fine line between too much leadership, which erodes collective feeling, and a default of leadership” (Cockcroft, Weber, and Cockcroft 200). I tried to find a balance between maximizing volunteer participation and keeping with my own artistic vision. It was not possible to find a perfect balance; some days I would not paint at all because I was constantly directing youth; other days no volunteers came and I would paint for hours alone. I learned to become more comfortable with this imbalance, knowing that the pendulum would soon swing back the other way.

After studying muralist groups such as the BRP that hold a highly collective practice above all else, I was refreshed to find other muralists who have felt free to paint using a variety of mural practices. John Weber of the Chicago Mural Group comments: “Reflecting our recognition of the need for artist autonomy, our approaches have ranged from individually designed and executed “signature” murals, to directed team murals, to collective children’s murals” (Cockcroft, Weber, and Cockcroft 156). This acknowledges that each type of muralism has a certain social value, and that artists may adjust their mural practice to different social contexts.

**Design Brainstorming**

“When el artista se identifica con el pueblo, que es su público, su obra contendrá los símbolos ideológicos más pertinentes a sus aspiraciones, esperanzas, y sueños” - Arnold Belkin (Belkin 114).

In early June I met with Gustavo Lira, Mexican-born, Minneapolis-based muralist, and he gave me some helpful insights about to approach collaborative

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20 “When the artist identifies with the common people, which is his public, his work will contain the ideological symbols most pertinent to their hopes, dreams, and aspirations” (translated by the author).
community murals. He recommended that I host several brainstorming meetings with community members to get their design ideas flowing around a theme. The youth workshops that I organized in June were inspired by Lira’s model, as we talked about identity. One day we drew symbols to represent part of our identities and made them into stamps. A variety of stamps emerged – from enchiladas to footballs, to volleyballs to flowers. Another day I had the kids create coats of arms. One creative young boy used his coat of arms to design a particularly interesting storyboard that told of the legend of his African ancestors fighting a wild beast. Enchiladas and footballs were again common symbols in this activity, oftentimes occurring in the same coat of arms. I thought this juxtaposition of the Mexican enchilada and the American football was a perfect example of the rich new culture that is developing among the youth in Cold Spring.

In contrast to the Colectivo BRP mural at UTPCH, none of the youth’s images from my workshops were directly transferred onto the end mural design. At first glance, one might see this as a lack of democracy in the mural process. However, it is important to remember that: 1) I had to incorporate input from many other sources besides the children, and 2) the workshops were still invaluable for creating momentum for the mural project. Recall Laraña, Johnston, and Gusfield’s theory that cultivating identity is essential to developing new social movements, and that this collective identity is achieved through small group discussion. Before youth could think about what they might want to say in a public art project, they needed to begin practicing how to define themselves verbally and visually. These exercises inspired several of the older workshop participants (over 10 years old, the minimum painting age) to become painting volunteers.

To enhance democracy in the brainstorming process, I would have liked to organize a Latino big community mural meeting that included adults, as Gustavo Lira recommended. However, Bales and Gudiel warned me that it was nearly impossible to get very many people together at once. Most Latino parents worked long hours during the week, and those who did come to Sunday Mass preferred to go home and relax in the summer weather rather than stay for a meeting. Bales also
expressed concerns about managing logistics - we would have had to obtain food to motivate people to attend, and find someone to provide childcare.

Despite this minor obstacle, I involved the Latino community as much as I could in collecting ideas for the mural design: I asked for input at my workshops for the youth, after teaching English classes, and at church after Spanish Mass. At Bales’s advice, I also sat for a day at the Mexican Store, La Perla Market, to converse directly with customers about their thoughts for a mural. In addition to these tactics, in hindsight I think it would also have been useful to follow Gudiel’s suggestion to go door-to-door in the town trailer park asking neighbors for input on the mural. This would have created a broader frame of influence by reaching a greater number Latinos who weren’t as involved with CGMC.

I feel that these one-on-one conversations may have actually been more effective than a large-scale community meeting. Indeed, Rogers and Singhal express that empowerment is best facilitated through small group conversation (Rogers and Singhal, 69). If nothing else, I got to know community members on a more personal level.

One particular interview that was very informative for the mural design was with Father Freddimir, a Venezuelan priest who gives Spanish Mass at St. Boniface Church. After Mass one day, I sat and with him in Spanish and asked him some of the design questions, including “If diversity were an image, what would it look like to you?” He answered (and I paraphrase): “I think diversity would look like a river. In my country, there are two rivers that run parallel – the Caroni, which is black, and the Orinoco, which is the color of yellow earth. Eventually they intersect and begin to flow together, yet the colors remain distinct for quite a while.” I agree that this vision of valuing difference in unity is the perfect image for diversity. In the mural, then, I designed the black hair of the indigenous Latina grandmother and the yellow (white-blonde) hair of the German grandmother to converge as the Caroni and Orinoco rivers do, with the colors interwoven together. The interwoven hair, which eventually turns blue, also represents the Sauk River, so important to a town named after water.
The other half of the mural’s story was the Anglo/German side of Cold Spring. To include this group, I met with members of the Cold Spring Historical Society to discuss important events and landmarks to be included in the mural. The Historical Society President even gave me an extensive tour in which we visited several significant sites. Some effects of this specific tour that are evident in the mural include the depiction of the granite fire ring (one of several made to commemorate the Native American tribes that once gathered in the Rocori area), several historic buildings, and the landscape perspective. Many of the other historical references in the mural were gleaned from my conversations with the Society.

After I had gathered all these stories from community members, I met with CGMC directors Mayuli Bales and Raquel Gudiel to finalize the design. During this stage, Bales and Gudiel acted as representatives of the Latino community as they shared their opinions on my developing sketches. Bales was interested in seeing symbols she called “universal,” such as the sun for energy. Her concern for “universality” reveals her desire that the mural appeal to people of all cultures. Certain other elements she and Gudiel also deemed necessary, such as a strong adult Latino figure – a doctor, lawyer, or teacher – to provide a shining example of the better future ahead for Latino children. The final design we agreed on for the end of the mural was my drawing of a teacher standing by the children at the playground, with three silhouettes of grown-up children walking towards the horizon (Figure 38). As will be discussed later on, this part of the design was to be subject to further change.

Compared to the nearly two months of legal research necessary to obtain permission to paint the mural in Cold Spring, the process for city approval of the final design was quite simple - a Planning Commission representative only had to verify that the mural did not contain obscenities or advertisements. After the design was approved, I began to search for ways to promote it.

On July 29, at Cold Spring’s “Hometown Pride” Festival, I set up a small booth next to CGMC’s taco stand to publicize the mural, collect donations for paint, and recruit painting volunteers. Up until this point, I had been having difficulty stirring
up mural interest in youth over age 12, and I was beginning to lose hope. It was important for me that the mural involve teenagers and young adults; they would have both an abundance of youthful energy to direct towards the mural and the maturity to critically reflect on the mural’s meaning and take on responsibilities. For the mural to be part of a sustainable social movement, I needed the active commitment of this age group.

That night at the festival was the turning point: as I was packing up to go trace the design onto the wall by myself, I happened to drop a dime from the donation box. It rolled over to a group of young adults, and one of them asked me about the project. We got talking, and they seemed very excited about the idea of painting on a city wall. Four of them came and helped me trace that first night, and two became dedicated long-term volunteers.

**Empowering Citizens Through Involvement in the Mural Process**

Over the course of two months, many members of the Cold Spring mural audience became actors in the town mural performance. I say *performance* in order to emphasize the art of the process. Over thirty people put paint to wall, many came more than once, and about eight were regular volunteers.

At times I wonder if the mural in Cold Spring could have been even more collaborative, and therefore more empowering. I compare myself to Yolanda López, of Chicano Park, who acted as a removed facilitator for the high school girls’ mural, *Preserve Our Heritage*. If I acted as a removed facilitator, then the volunteers would have had much more control over the final product, but it might not have been aesthetically pleasing or meaningful to the wider community. The design process for the Cold Spring Mural involved a great deal of community research, while *Preserve Our Heritage* was a very personal expression for the girls. It would also have been difficult to get city permission for a permanent public mural done principally by youth with limited artistic experience.

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21 Images of the mural in process can be found in Figures 39 – 43.
If I had created a more graphic design for the mural, such as that of the BRP, it may have been easier to create a cohesive design that allowed non-artists to see their own hand in the finished product. However, in the end, I feel that the mural was a good compromise between the “traditional art world” and the fight for social change. We chose a style inspired by the Mexican School to celebrate the ethnic pride of the majority of Latinos in Cold Spring, but besides that, this classical, more traditional painting style appeased the conservative Anglos that had never had a mural in their city. They respected the aesthetic of renowned artist Diego Rivera, a classic style that influenced many WPA murals in the 1930s and that is found in various historical murals in Minnesota. For these reasons I took inspiration from the Mexican muralist aesthetic and adapted it with my own personal style. During the painting process, the volunteers’ personal touches also began to reveal themselves. By refraining from retouching some of these individual expressions, the volunteer can see her own contribution to the mural and feel a sense of pride that raises her social efficacy.

As I thought about empowerment more, I realized that it was not limited to the physical act of painting. By actively participating in discussions about the mural’s meaning, community members could also be empowered. Indeed, the most exciting part of the painting process was the conversations we had – conversations about race, history, the definition of art, and simply getting to know one another. From these conversations grew relationships among painters, and between painters and passersby. As sociologist Rogers and Singhals have noted, it is through interactive conversations like these that true empowerment (and therefore behavioral and social change) takes place.

One of my favorite community-building memories is from August 2nd, one of the first days of painting. That evening, Gustavo Lira came to help our team trace the projected design onto the wall. As we were tracing, an entire Latino family out for a walk stopped to watch us in action. The mother of the family, an elderly woman, chattered on in excited Spanish about how her grown daughters used to do decorative painting in churches. I told her that was wonderful, and that her daughters were more than welcome to come and paint this mural if they so liked.
Bright and early the next morning, one of her daughters and her granddaughter came and did just that.

The congregation around the mural that August evening was exactly the kind of community atmosphere that I wanted the mural to help build. One could feel the excitement and awe in that family’s eyes as they watched us trace the face of the indigenous Latina woman. The Laundromat, a place where many Latino families frequented, was now becoming a place to celebrate being Latino in Cold Spring.

Another instance of empowering dialogue occurred on August 13 when I was painting with one other volunteer. A man approached the two of us to say that the mural reminded him of his childhood; he had grown up on a rural farm in South Dakota, never even seeing a black person until he was nine years old. He told us it was very wonderful what we were doing to raise awareness of racial diversity. This story strikes me as significant, as so many people are brought up with this stereotype that small towns are very “white.” Cold Spring is a prime example of how that small-town racial dynamic has been quickly changing in the past several years. The mural reflects the growing ethnic diversity in the Cold Spring area – not just of Latinos, but of Somalis and other cultures as well – and promotes racial/cultural integration.

The presence of other races shows that the need for racial inclusion in Cold Spring extends beyond Latinos. At one point in the mural process, a Latino youth volunteer expressed negative feelings toward black people, saying he didn’t want to paint with them because they were lazy. I was a bit taken aback at first, responding that I was sorry he felt that way and hoped it wouldn’t always be the case, because it went against everything our mural was about. When I asked him why he felt that way, he told me that that was the way his father had raised him in Mexico. That made me consider my own upbringing and how grateful I was to have been raised in a diverse family. The volunteer and I continued our intense conversation for a little while, and though we did not reach any astounding revelation, he did later end up painting alongside black volunteers on several occasions without conflict.

As the above stories illustrate, lack of exposure is one of the forces that perpetuates these prejudices. Exposure is often limited for those living in small
towns; according to the 2010 census, there are only nine African Americans living in Cold Spring (U.S. Census Bureau). The man from South Dakota has undoubtedly changed his view of African Americans since before he first met a black person at age nine. Likewise, I believe that the Latino youth’s perception of blacks as “lazy” can change after he gets to know more of them. The mural process helped to facilitate a little bit of this interracial interaction, and I hope he meets more people that challenge his stereotypical view.

Conversations also highlighted the Native American culture. On several other occasions, passersby commented on “the Native American man” (the Latina indigenous figure). I viewed this as a positive, as Bales wanted to play up the connections that the indigenous people of Minnesota have with the indigenous of Mexico. Such a connection increases the sense of history, place, and belonging for the indigenous Latino population in Cold Spring, as Native Americans were in the Cold Spring area long before the German immigrants came.

Even though Native Americans have a long history in the Cold Spring area, not many of them remain. There are currently nine Native Americans in Cold Spring according to the 2010 census (U.S. Census Bureau). We were lucky enough to have an Ojibwa woman from a neighboring town, Jiibay Shadow Dancer, join our painting group. As we worked, she would often tell us stories about what it was like growing up in the tribe. Shadow Dancer exhibited great attention to detail, as she had learned to paint with porcupine quills. She also contributed to the mural design: the sun was inspired by her “Native Sun” symbol. These types of intercultural conversations promoted racial and cultural integration.

Interactive dialogue caused changes in the mural design even after it was officially approved. I loved it when one young volunteer started to make the mural her own, voicing her opinions openly: “... this should be a different color...” or “we need to change that part.” When Bales mentioned a community member’s concern that the growing Somali community was lacking representation in the mural, we quickly added a young Somali girl on the merry-go-round.

The mural’s ending is an example of an even more profound design change due to organic community collaboration. I had never been very satisfied with this
part of my original design, and my feelings were reinforced by youth’s jokes that the teacher looked like a “creep” or “stalker” spying on the children. I had to laugh along with their jokes, but I also took a serious re-examination of the design and how to resolve it so that it was both more aesthetically pleasing and more symbolically meaningful.

Mayuli Bales had also commented on this end section, saying that the small teacher figure combined with the tiny river flowing towards the horizon and small silhouettes made it feel as though the community was petering out, disappearing into the distance (Figure 44). This was counterproductive to our mural’s goal; we wanted a strong finish for the mural to imply a strong future for the Latino community.

When coming up with an alternate design, I drew on my knowledge of Chicano history and modeled the finishing figure on César Chávez, a Chicano activist who organized the United Farm Workers’ strikes in the 1960s (González 105). I placed Chávez as a monumental figure to balance out the two monumental female figures on the left side (Figure 45). He became a teacher facing the children, holding before them an open book and pointing toward the horizon. Raquel Gudiel found a César Chávez quote that fit perfectly with our mural’s message, which we wrote on the pages of the book in both Spanish and English: “We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community” (UFW).

Involving community members in the brainstorming and painting processes creates a network for protection and preservation of the finished mural. One night in September as the inauguration date was fast approaching, I invited several youths to help me finish scraping the old paint off the far right wall to prep it for finishing off the altered design. One teenage boy who had volunteered only intermittently began to joke about how he was going to spray paint some graffiti on the mural. In response, a dedicated young adult volunteer (a graffiti artist himself) rebuked, “No way, man. We put way too much time into this mural.” That seemed to change the boy’s mind, as he sheepishly agreed that he would not spray graffiti. This story supports the assertion that involving youth in the mural process increases their
respect for and sense of ownership of the mural and decreases the likelihood that they will vandalize it with graffiti.

It is my hope that the sense of ownership and accomplishment that volunteers felt from the Cold Spring mural will empower them to organize their own community projects in the future. One fourteen-year-old painting volunteer told me, “I hope this mural is here for a long time. I want to show my kids where I painted.” The pride felt by this one youth alone is enough to make the entire project worth all the effort.

Historical Memory, a Voice for the Marginalized, and a Common Cultural Identity

Figure 46 displays the final mural design (slightly changed since the one approved by the Planning Commission) and also offers a key to understanding the symbols and historical references. Through these symbols, the mural portrayed the historical memory of Cold Spring through a lens that not only expressed the voice of the marginalized Latino culture, but also harmonized Latino and Anglo/German cultures. Viewers from both cultures can identify with some of the symbols, historical references, or geographical elements. The combination of parts of Latino and Anglo culture and history resulted in the creation of a new common cultural identity. This is significant because, according to Melucci, a collective identity is necessary to generate a social movement.

Besides the creation of a shared identity, both individual cultures also mutually affected each other through the process of transculturation. For example, as Anglos identify with the mural as a representation of their own culture, that culture now includes Latino icons such as the Virgin of Guadalupe and César Chávez. When Latinos identify with the mural, they also begin to identify with parts of Cold Spring’s Anglo culture and history that they would not have otherwise: a German immigrant, the grasshopper plagues of the 1870s, the soda pop factory of the early 1900s, etc. The formation of a shared identity, along with transculturation, promotes the social progress goal of racial/cultural integration.
In addition to promoting racial/cultural integration, the mural’s historical memory also honored the strong female leadership I had witnessed as I worked with CGMC. Mayuli Bales, director, and assistant director Raquel Gudiel served as invaluable confidantes in this project, teaching me how to effectively organize a community. I got to know several other strong Latinas during my art workshops, at a leadership workshop, and through my participation in the Latina-led Spanish Mass choir.

I once called the mural design “a sisterhood of cultures;” this can be seen particularly at the mural’s beginning on the far left, where two monumental female half-figures emerge from the earth. They are grandmother spirits full of wisdom from the years, guiding their children toward the future. The lower spirit represents early German immigrants to Cold Spring in the mid 1800s. In the above corner an indigenous spirit wears a cloak reminiscent of the Virgin of Guadalupe, a revered icon for Mexican Catholics. Placing Guadalupe’s cloak over an old indigenous woman brings reverence to the indigenous traditions of the past. The respect and agency given to these monumental female figures promotes women’s empowerment.

Paolo Freire and Saul Alinsky would argue that the Cold Spring Mural’s historical memory has “altered” the existing relationship between Latinos and Anglos, “two unequal entities” (Rogers and Singhal, 71). One way in which the mural directly (yet subtly) addresses this shift in relationship is by placing the Latina grandmother figure above the German grandmother – challenging traditional power relations between the two races. Thus the marginalized Latino culture is raised up to be in dialogue with the dominant Anglo culture, promoting Latino cultural autonomy.

**Transforming the Meaning of Space**

Though the mural’s location was determined more or less by luck and process of elimination, I could not have planned it any better. Both the wall of the Cold Spring Cleaners Laundromat and the grassy area in front of it are private
properties owned by two separate businesses, but the presence of the mural makes them both virtually public. The grassy slope in front provides an ideal location for stepping back and viewing the complete mural from a distance; it even has the potential to host future community events, similar to those of Chicano Park (Figure 47).

The mural sits kitty-corner from St. Boniface Church, placing it in direct conversation with churchgoers who see it as they climb the steps of the church’s main entrance. The windows in the church’s social hall also provide a complete view of the mural. This proximity to St. Boniface is significant, as the church has played a substantial role in CGMC’s development. The mural, in a sense, visualizes the social changes that the CGMC has created, showing the St. Boniface community that CGMC has been well worth the investment.

The dialogue that the mural created fostered a network of community support of the project. Some if it has been made tangible through in-kind donations. Dan Kippley, owner of Cold Spring Cleaners, donated the use of his wall. Lumber One donated several cans of paint, and Wenner Hardware donated the use of their power washer and ladders. Cold Spring Rental also gave us a deal on the scaffolding. La Perla Market kept a box by their cash register for donations for the mural’s paint. College of Saint Benedict/Saint John’s University Department of Undergraduate Research also provided significant funds. More than once a kind neighbor stopped by the mural to provide kind words of encouragement, monetary donations, and snacks to keep the painting team’s energy high. All of these community investments in the mural change the space’s meaning for each person who donated their time, money, energy, or words of advice. No longer is the building a random Laundromat; now individuals can personally identify with it, at the same time feeling a part of a larger community.

This is a place where Latinos already frequented, and now they are even more welcomed. The respect that the wider Cold Spring community has for the mural is translated into increased respect for Latino culture. Through transforming the meaning of the space, the mural thus promotes racial and cultural integration.
Influencing the Dominant Mass Media

Throughout the mural process, we have used the mass media as a tool to promote the Cold Spring Mural's message. Even before paint splattered wall on July 29, I wrote an article to the Cold Spring Record to garner local support, and I continued to do write throughout the mural process (Figures 48, 50, and 52). The president of the Cold Spring Historical Society also showed strong support for the mural when he made a promotional video of me explaining the mural symbolism with the mural design and the roughed-in painting on the wall. This video was posted on the Rocori DigElog website at the beginning of August 2011 and has had 147 YouTube views as of February 2012. It has helped the mural gain publicity, becoming a part of a larger community conversation.

Other community connections proved important for publicity as well. Raquel Gudiel suggested that I contact TaLeiza Calloway, writer for the St. Cloud Times. Calloway was particularly interested in Central Minnesota’s diverse cultures, and had done previous stories for CGMC. On August 16, 2011, she and a photographer visited the mural in process and interviewed Raquel Gudiel, Yesenia Torres (youth representative for CGMC), and me. The story appeared the next morning in printed form and as an online video (Figure 51). Though this was positive representation for CGMC and the Latino community in Cold Spring, on that particular day not as many Latino volunteers attended, resulting in a disproportionately small number of Latino faces in the photos and video. Still, the article, titled “Portrait of Diversity,” brought attention to CGMC’s mission and the growing diversity in Cold Spring: Torres is quoted, “I think it shows that there are more cultures living in Cold Spring than people realize” (Calloway 4B).

The mural also inspired local T.V. channels. In the latter half of the mural-making process, the director of Cold Spring’s local cable channel 10 (also Chair of the Planning Commission) came to film us painting a few times, and also interviewed four of the female leaders behind the project – Mayuli Bales, Raquel Gudiel, Yesenia Torres, and myself. He also came and filmed during the mural’s inauguration on September 23. CSBSJU students from Project Eight (the student-
run channel 8) also came to film in late August, and they are currently working on their own documentary project related to the mural.

**Mutual Transformation**

True to the nature of Roger and Singhal’s concept of empowerment through dialogic communication, the Cold Spring mural experience has been a process of mutual transformation between the community and myself. From listening to the community’s stories and organizing this mural project I have gained so much more than I will ever be able to give back.

Organizing this mural project has welcomed me into Cold Spring’s Latino culture. In May, 2011, I became part of the Sunday Spanish Mass choir. The June art workshops I led in the trailer park gave me glimpses into the lives of the Latino youth that attended. In July I was even lucky enough to attend my first *Quinceañera*. As I have stated, the conversations during the mural painting process were also cultural exchanges from which I learned a great deal. During one of these conversations, a volunteer told me that, not to be racist, but I was probably one of the coolest white people she’d ever met. That made me smile. Throughout the year I have been continuing to sing in the Spanish Mass choir as many Sundays as I can, and Father Freddimir has recently declared me part of the family.

Eva Cockcroft reflects on how being a community muralist has taught her to become a “teacher, group leader, organizer, public speaker” (Cockcroft, Weber, and Cockcroft xx). As a newly initiated community muralist myself, I could not agree with her more. Beyond simply using my artistic training, the process of organizing the Cold Spring Mural has given me experience in instructing painting volunteers and practice with public speaking. It has also taught me that muralism as a public art form is inherently political. By “political” I mean to say that it involves negotiations on many levels. In the Cold Spring Mural, some of the principal negotiations included finding a partnering organization, obtaining permission from the Planning Commission, finding a willing wall donor, and working with the community members to make the mural design.
Mayuli Bales is one of the many people who helped guide me through community negotiations. She is a very skilled organizer; she knows her community well. From working with her I have learned so much about what it takes to unite a group of people around a common goal. She once told me that a leader is not someone directing from the front, but rather encouraging from the back. A leader is someone working behind the scenes to empower other members of the community. I have incredible respect for Bales and her vision of leadership, which I hope to take with me into the future.

The Cold Spring Mural's Afterlife

The Cold Spring mural has lived on even after its completion; its presence continues to affect Cold Spring every day. Bales stressed at the mural inauguration that it must not be an ending, but rather a beginning. One way I actively continued my relationship with Casa Guadalupe was through singing at Spanish Mass, as well as working with Bales to organize an October art workshop making ofrendas (offerings) for the Day of the Dead Celebration.

I have also presented my experience of the project at a number of different venues outside of Cold Spring. Each of these presentations helped to expand the mural’s social sphere of influence:

1) October 2011 - The CGMC directors and I were invited to speak to our experience collaborating on the mural project at a Saint Cloud State University (SCSU) colloquium. The talk was a success with about twenty people attending.

2) February 8, 2012 - I presented on my experience at a Minneapolis conference (FACETS) designed to give art teachers ways to bring Latino Arts and culture into the classroom. I was a co-presenter with Gustavo Lira, who also shared his experience facilitating community murals.

3) February 22, 2012 - I presented the mural project at the State Capitol at a
In January 2012 I met with Mayuli Bales to discuss the mural’s future. Our conversation is telling of Bales’s belief in the social power of the mural; for example, she asked me about using it for CGMC’s logo. Just as the murals of Chicano Park recruited institutional support in San Diego, California, Bales sees the Cold Spring Mural as a conduit for building relationships with people in power, people that can donate resources to CGMC to improve its programs. One such program, she imagined, could be focused on Latino Arts, providing youth workshops on the theme of identity through the tradition of the Day of the Dead. Together we came up with a list of potential institutional partners, including the Cold Spring Chamber of Commerce. Bales especially hopes to get CSBSJU and SCSU departments involved to bring more passionate college student energy.

Regarding the mural more specifically, we talked about the need for some kind of system and fund dedicated to its upkeep. Dan Kippley, the wall owner, will need to be part of this continued conversation. We will be setting up a plaque nearby the mural to explain its symbolism and to let people know that CGMC was a collaborative partner in the project. So far a local granite company has pledged to donate this plaque, which I have begun to design.

After this conversation, I was fired up to go make all these things happen – I felt that my job hadn’t been finished, that the changes we were seeking were just planted seeds. My desire to help Bales with these plans, though, conflicted with several other projects and responsibilities I had at the time. This made me pause and reflect on my role as a public artist. I pondered the intensely involved and dedicated muralists of Chicano Park who worked together for several years towards the goal of developing the park holistically. Now that the Cold Spring Mural was
officially completed, was it my responsibility to take on all these related projects as well, just as the Chicano Park artists did?

The answer to this question is: yes and no. On one hand, since I view the process of building relationships as part of the artwork, it only makes sense that I help to facilitate these connections as best as I can. Because I want to make sure that people understand the symbolic significance of the mural that I designed, it also makes sense for me to design the mural plaque. On the other hand, I will not be living around Cold Spring forever - community members that were involved with the mural will need to take responsibility for many of these subsequent projects.

Let us think of the Cold Spring Mural as a kind of micro social movement, part of the social movement of CGMC. According to sociologist Everett M. Rogers, a social movement is started by a “charismatic leader,” but for long-term success it needs to become an institutionalized organization (Rogers 778). He proposes that: “The role of the charismatic leader in a social movement decreases as the movement becomes institutionalized into a more highly structured organization” (Rogers 780). Either the “charismatic leader” becomes more organized, or “a new, more administratively adept executive” steps up to the plate (Rogers 778).

If I am the “charismatic leader” of the Cold Spring Mural movement, then it is natural for my role to be subsiding at this point in time. To ensure that the social changes that the Cold Spring mural promoted are not lost, a new organizational leader must assume responsibility for the development of the mural’s potential, continuing to use it as a tool to maintain the relationships it has created. Mayuli Bales, the organizational leader of CGMC, will assume this role to some extent. However, as CGMC is already juggling multiple projects, Bales will need more staff and volunteers to assist her with a Latino Arts Program. It is my hope that the mural has inspired someone in the community enough to take on this endeavor, for the sustainable social impact of the Cold Spring Mural depends on how CGMC will be able to use it in the future.
Conclusions

Social movements in Latino/Latin American culture have fought for cultural/political autonomy, grassroots democracy, economic equality, racial/cultural integration, and women’s empowerment. Many of these movements have taken advantage of the mural’s power to transform society; murals have been used to form solidarity within a group, define social conflicts, and rebel against the current system (New Social, 10). The mural’s development of a social movement takes place through the various indicators for social change that I have specified.

Despite popular belief that Mexican School muralists such as Diego Rivera effected profound social change, their individualistic mural practice and predominantly indoor mural location limited public access to meaning and thus fell short of meeting my standard of social change. Nevertheless, the Mexican School left a legacy that inspired several other mural movements in Latin America and the U.S, movements that did effect social change. I too, took inspiration from Mexican School aesthetics as I drew up the Cold Spring Mural design.

The Brigada Ramona Parra also informed the development of the Cold Spring Mural process. However, instead of becoming a symbol of drastic rebellion against the system, like the murals by the BRP, the Cold Spring Mural represents a subtle rebellion, working within the rules of society – pushing them rather than breaking them. In that sense, the Mural is similar to the Mexican School, which enjoyed strong institutional support.

The fact that the Cold Spring Mural process worked within the existing social structure does not mean that it conformed to it. The challenges I faced in obtaining government permission for the Mural reveal a “breach of compatibility with the system” that marks a social movement (Touraine 764), distinguishing the Cold Spring Mural from the government-funded Mexican School. Working through these challenges sparked dialogical communication across cultures, which led to behavioral and social changes. The mere existence of the Mural is evidence of the social changes that were necessary to bring it about.
Just as Chicano Park muralists shaped a new establishment by working with the Anglo-dominated government of San Diego, the Cold Spring Mural has also become part of a new social system. As the mural is perceived as part of the existing system, a wider audience is able to identify with it, giving CGMC more Anglo allies and forming a shared collective identity between Anglos and Latinos.

The Cold Spring Mural has *provided a voice for the marginalized* by giving Latinos a visual presence in the community. It incorporates them into Cold Spring’s *historical memory*, forming a new *common cultural identity* for the entire town. The mural has also *transformed the meaning* of the Cold Spring Cleaners Laundromat, making the private building public. It has *influenced the dominant mass media* by appearing in several Cold Spring Record newspaper articles, the Rocori DigElog website, and the St. Cloud Times. These articles have generated awareness and conversation about the town’s growing diversity.

Most profoundly, the Cold Spring Mural has empowered citizens through involvement in the process. Whether that involvement took place through design brainstorming, in-kind donations, or painting, each instance of involvement inspired dialogical interaction that empowered participants by raising their awareness about the growing diversity in Cold Spring. Participation in the mural process also increased the self-efficacy of volunteers, making them feel like they were making a difference. I hope that this sense of efficacy inspires them to take action towards changing other aspects of the current social system (the third characteristic of a social movement).

The Cold Spring Mural can be a catalyst for more social change, but the community will need to continue to actively promote that change. Like the community murals of Chicano Park and the Colectivo BRP, the future of the Cold Spring Mural relies on continued collective action led by an organizer (or team of organizers) coupled with broader community support. Due to the Cold Spring Mural’s participatory process, the network of community support is strong. These relationships will need to be maintained in order to further sustainable change.
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