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Adeline Rose Schmitz

University of San Francisco, aschmitz1@usfca.edu

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RESISTANCE ART AND URBAN SPACE

A Strategic Comparison of Artistic Urban Space Usage in Buenos Aires and San Francisco

Adeline Schmitz

University of San Francisco | International Studies Honors Thesis

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Abstract

In the early Twentieth century the Mexican Muralism movement reached two important port cities: San Francisco and Buenos Aires. The artists in these cities quickly adopted the usage of public art as means to insert political dialogue into the everyday life of their citizens. Throughout the years the resistance art in these cities has evolved in parallel, shaped by their dynamic histories of social and political change. This paper critically compares the evolutions of resistance art in Buenos Aires and San Francisco over the past twenty years. It does so by analyzing the public art archives of local collectives in conjunction with timely newspaper articles. Using interviews with various collectives and artists this paper is able to holistically analyze the impact and form of resistance art evolutions in these cities. By exploring the evolution and experience of resistance art at a phenomenological level I find that the socio-political histories of these cities have a profound effect on resistance art. Additionally, I found that the organization and monopolization of urban space can directly impact the provocativeness of these experiences. As we move forward, I find that it is imperative for the everyday citizen to participate in the critique of our everyday encounters with resistance art in urban spaces, questioning what these structures are telling us implicitly and explicitly about our cities.

Keywords

Urban Space, Resistance Art, Gentrification, Phenomenology, Political and Social Revolutions, the Critique of the Everyday

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Introduction

In January of 2022 I moved to Buenos Aires, Argentina. Walking the streets of this historic city I was in awe of the profound conversations occurring. These conversations were not happening interpersonally but, on the walls, bus stations, and billboards of the city. Everything was covered in art: resistance art. The walls were covered in political paste ups, colorful sweet nothings, and provocative graffiti sprawls. As I came to know the city a bit more, I began to think about the implications of these conversations happening on the walls: did they inspire others as they did me? Did they make people consider what the implications of their political and social beliefs were? Did they stop and ponder what part they could play in the revolution? And so, I began to ask questions, attempting to unearth what effects these experiences of resistance art had on the everyday citizen.

One evening I was having a conversation with the woman I lived with at the time, our main topic of conversation often involved the current political crisis of the day and that night I had begun the conversation about art. During our discussion she told me “las políticas están en todas partes”¹. As a self-proclaimed political expert, she taught me much of what I now know concerning the political atmosphere in Argentina. She patiently explained to me the working-class fight, which players hold what power in the game of government, and the distinct forms of protest within the country. During my time in Buenos Aires many friends (local and foreign) would go on to explain to me what the art on the walls meant to them. Many of them expressed sentiments of political enlightenment with a distinct tone of hope: hope for change, hope for our world.

¹ Politics are everywhere

Meditating upon the resistance art in Buenos Aires consistently reminded me of the city I had called home for much of my adult life: San Francisco. San Francisco has been the catalyst of many recent provocative and progressive revolutions in contemporary United States history. The walls of this city have been used in various movements. The streets of San Francisco continue to talk. The daily walk about the city is broken up between crosswalk stencil art, buildings decorated in murals, and ever so evolving graffiti messages. I have spent four years in this city and not one day has gone by where I did not pass a work of resistance art. As I have begun to better understand the political underworking of this city through anecdotes, university classes, and my current employment in city hall. I have begun to realize that the art that exists here in San Francisco exists to make us question the actions and thoughts of our everyday lives.

Through this meditation and exploration, I have come to find that cities are composed of many parts, they are transient. People flit in and out, some stay for a lifetime, some for a year or two, and some for only an hour. Cities are homes to families, friends, artists, scientists, the homed, and the homeless. Revolutions live and die within cities. Urban space and resistance art has influenced many of these revolutions. Artists and the consumers of art (arguably artists themselves) ignite and evolve these revolutions. If we consider the protest art of the most recent George Floyd protests, we've seen streets painted in impromptu murals, boarded up businesses became blank canvases, and buildings became the blank pages of our societies journal. These disruptions bring consciousness of the fight to anyone who encounters them. The city, the revolution, the art, they all intermingle in the oneness of the urban environment.

By living and exploring the urban conversations in both San Francisco and Buenos Aires I realized that both these cities have robust and diverse urban art scenes. The way that the walls, artists, and mediums interact with each other are wildly different. The differences stem far beyond the messages on the walls, they manifest in the way artists' do their work, and how the various citizens and transient peoples in these cities perceive and interact with the streets. In the following pages I will attempt to answer the question of: How are artists in these cities using urban space differently as political forms of resistance?

Literature Review

This literature review aims to acquaint the reader with the multidimensional use of urban spaces in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and the San Francisco Bay Area both historically and contemporarily. It will be exploring how urban spaces within these cities are being used by artists to express political and social dissidence. I will be illustrating the experiences of resistance art² within these urban spaces: defining resistance art, urban space, neoliberal commodification, belonging, and reclaiming the terms consumer and producer from the capitalistic experience. The Clarion Alley Mural Project and Paint the Void in San Francisco, and Graffitimundo in Buenos Aires are artist cooperatives that have played crucial roles in their respected cities, uplifting, and educating folks on the urban experiences of resistance art. In collaboration with the information shared by these cooperatives I will also be drawing on works from various other academic works. Additionally, I will be drawing on a variety of case studies that illustrate the use of resistance art in urban space. The purpose of this literature review is to

² In the confines of this essay, I will be using the phrase "resistance art" when describing politically charged murals, graffiti, stencils, and posters.

develop a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of resistance art in Buenos Aires and San Francisco through the examination of the history, urban space, and the artist.

San Francisco and Buenos Aires: Vibes Unlocked

Resistance art within San Francisco and Buenos Aires both have roots in the early twentieth century Mexican Muralism Movement (Blue & Graffitimundo). The Mexican Muralism Movement was the first contemporary movement to publicly display explicit protest within art (Malott). As Graffitimundo highlights the Mexican Muralism Movement radically shaped how art was viewed; as it “used public space to communicate with, engage and inspire the public by injecting art into their daily lives”. Beginning in 1920s the movement lasted until the 1950s. It was led by Mexican artists Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Jose Clemente Orozco, also known as Los Tres Grandes. These muralists were the voices of protest to the imbalance of sociohistorical conditions in Mexico and beyond (Malott). The Mexican Muralism Movement inspired the first instances of resistance art in both the Bay Area and Buenos Aires; although, moving onward through the twentieth century the two cities developed very different expressions of resistance art.

In the early twentieth century Diego Rivera one of the *Tres Grandes* was commissioned to paint three grandiose murals in San Francisco *the Allegory of California (1931)*, *The Making of a Fresco Showing the Building of a City (1931)*, and *Pan American Unity (1940)*. These murals were government commissioned. As Blue points out through Timothy W. Drescher’s definition of resistance art in his book *San Francisco Murals: Community Creates its Muse*, these early instances of government commissioned art in San Francisco were public works of art, as “Public

art is art done for a general, undefined population” and often is government funded. Thus, the first works done by Diego Rivera were classic examples of public art. Alternatively, as muralism grew it began to evolve and establish branches, collectives such as Precita Eyes, Clarion Alley Mural Project (CAMP), and eventually Paint the Void established urban experiences through community art. Community art is defined by Blue through Drescher’s book as “art [that] is created by or with a group of people who interact with the finished artwork” (Blue).

Community art has played a large part in shaping the history of San Francisco.

Authors Rachel Brahinsky and Alexander Tarr dive into the rich and radical history of the San Francisco Bay Area in their book *A Peoples Guide to the San Francisco Bay Area*. The Bay Area is a vibrant center for progressive policies and people driven social change movements, but paradoxically it is built on the capitalistic gold rush and now is home to the world’s largest Big Tech corporations. San Francisco is home to the 1960s culture revolution, vibrant immigrant communities, has become a LGBTQIA+ mecca, and evolved into a hub for union labor and anticorporate organizing. Throughout the years the Bay Area has been viewed as the beacon of progress, but our dark underbelly underscores the indecencies that big tech and gentrification has done to these once vibrant communities. San Francisco is still a rather progressive space, but it continues to struggle in addressing displacement and homelessness in the face of these capitalistic ventures. The dotcom boom of the early 2000s and the current tech boom has displaced many that originally immigrated to San Francisco and has gentrified the culture of the city. Clarion Alley Mural Project is a grassroots community-directed organization that uses public art as a means for supporting social, economic, racial, and environmental justice messaging and storytelling (CAMP). CAMP has played an integral role in protesting these

injustices city as they work with artists and the community to respond to the various gentrification, anti-immigrant, and capitalistic takeover attempts in the city.

Resistance art in San Francisco once again evolved in the wake of the 2020 Covid pandemic and the socio-political uprising following the death of George Floyd. Paint the Void, a nonprofit that began painting murals on boarded up businesses during the Covid 19 lockdown established art for the public through Holly Eva Ryan's affect/effect theory. This theory explores how the effect of an event on citizens affects their responses artistically. As Evans states an affect is the "a non-rationalized experience of felt intensity that results from external stimuli and precedes cognitive processing but may yet incite or complicate action" this action is the effect that Paint the Void organized upon. Another example of this affect/effect theory and the contemporary evolution of street art in the Bay Area is the protest art that followed the murder of Mr. Floyd. As illustrated in Lange-Churion and Zarobells' piece *Report from Oakland: The Art of Insurrection* artists and activists alike took to the streets developing works of "art that not so much as depicted but made history" (Lange-Churion and Zarobell, pg. 110). Overall resistance art within San Francisco has evolved as the political and social structures have changed throughout the city, with its roots in Mexican Muralism it now has branches in public, community, and protest art.

Buenos Aires has also experienced various evolutions in its resistance art. David Siqueiros, another member of the *Tres Grandes*, spent a brief stint in Buenos Aires during the mid-twentieth century creating the first grandiose expressions of resistance art (Graffitimundo). He inspired artists under turbulent political structures to respond to cycles of oppression with expression. Throughout the twentieth century Argentina experienced multiple periods of

dictatorship and democracy, with the final dictatorship falling in 1983. These shifts in government created rather hostile conditions for public expression, limiting how and where artist could display their works. The final Military dictatorship, also known as the Gobierno Militar, in Argentina lasted from 1976 until 1983. During this period the military junta disappeared an estimated 10,000 to 30,000 people. Given the repressive nature of the dictatorships in late twentieth century, artists had to develop quick and creative methods of resistance art, thus the phenomenon of stencils and paste ups began (*White Walls Say Nothing*).

In the documentary by Bradley Gates *White Walls Say Nothing* various artist collective such as Hollywood in Cambodia (HIC) and Vomit Attack explain how the economic crisis of 2001 in Argentina also inspired artists to take to the streets. The economic crisis of 2001 was a defining moment in Argentine history. The 1990s in Argentina boasted rapid economic growth due to Carlos Menem's partnership with the USA in the adaptation of the neoliberal Washington Consensus; unfortunately, the prescribed privatization and the opening of the Argentine market was not sustainable. In December of 2001 the Argentine government declared the biggest debt default in history. The economy spiraled and the streets of Buenos Aires were filled with protests. The following months were characterized by political instability, unemployment, and general anarchy.

The three types of resistant art styles that were further popularized from the 2001 Economic crisis were stencils, paste ups (posters), and Muñecismo. Merriam Webster Dictionary defines stencil art as "an impervious material (such as a sheet of paper, thin wax, or woven fabric) perforated with lettering or a design through which a substance (such as

ink, paint, or metallic powder) is forced onto a surface to be printed". During the crisis of 2001 many groups began using stencil art because it was a quick and easy way to decorate the streets and express their frustrations with the government. The usage of stencils has also evolved with the concept of paste ups, which is defined as posters adhesive to a blank wall (Graffitimundo). Often these paste ups are culture jammers³. Muñecismo is type of colaboración art (Graffitimundo, 2022). As explained on a graffiti tour by Graffitimundo groups of friends would often get together and paint all night creating bright and psychedelic murals, their hope was to interrupt the everyday chaos that characterized these times of turmoil with these bright distractions on the street. Stencil art, pasteups, and muñecismo continue to be contemporize methods of resistance art in Buenos Aires, responding now to the various social and political plights⁴ of Argentina.

Reclaiming Urban Space: yours, mine, ours!

Urban space in the context of this study can be taken under the definition of public space since we are using it in strong relation to the urban environment. Throughout this essay I will maintain the phrase urban space in the place of public space. Zoran Poposki provides multiple definitions of public space i.e., urban space in his article *Spaces of Democracy: Art, Politics and Artivism in the Post-socialist City*. Poposki defines public space as "the location where social identity is formed and represented, the stage where social practices

³ According to Waldron and Dobratz culture jamming "is defined as an appropriation of brand identity of advertising for subversive, often political intent... [it] is about stopping the flow of consumer culture saturated media (pg. 381)

⁴ Inflation, the legacy of neoliberalism, Kirchnerismo, Marci and the free market.

take place” (pg. 713). He continues to emphasize how important urban space is to the democratic freedom as it is where the public organizes, develops opinion, and expresses political interests and desires.

San Francisco and Buenos Aires define the usage of urban spaces differently through urban policies. As illustrated in Gates and Graffitimundo documentary, resistance art in Buenos Aires is contemporarily welcomed, although technically illegal. Whereas historically, specifically under the military dictatorship, resistance art was highly criminalized. In San Francisco the rules are a bit more defined as “The City's Graffiti Ordinance requires that private property owners abate graffiti from their buildings within 30 days. SF public works code article 23 section 1300: graffiti removal”. There is also a graffiti and vandal reward fund. Although, depending on the neighborhood these mechanisms are not always stringently upheld by law enforcement. It is also legal for property owners to commission artists to paint murals on their buildings, as well as retort to the city that an identified tag or graffiti is in fact a mural. These policies impact the mediums that artists work with, inspiring legitimized murals in San Francisco, and quicker more provocative messages in Buenos Aires.

Both Buenos Aires and San Francisco are global cities, thus the demographic desirability and touristic appeal of these cities are often considered in the development politics of the cities. Richard Florida popularized the creative city theory in the early 2000s in his book “Rise of the Creative Class”. Florida theorized that if a city markets itself towards the creative class, developing creative spaces, and using urban art as a “cool” incentive then cities will in turn attract wealthier patrons and increased development (Florida). Resistance art is a distinct sign

in a city that creatives reside in the community. Florida's theory of creative cities is widely known, and many urban planners have adopted his ideas. Urban planners have developed space and collaborations between city governments and artists to market their cities as creative. Many academics have responded illustrating the dangers of the creative city marketing, Eva Youkhana highlights in her study *Creative Activism and Art Against Urban Renaissance and Social Exclusion - Space Sensitive Approaches to the Study of Collective Action and Belonging* how contemporary politics of place are stimulating capitalist appropriation and privatization of urban spaces. This commodification of space is destroying the senses of belonging that resistance art provides in neighborhoods and communities. Rafael Schacter in his article *The Ugly Truth: Street Art, Graffiti and the Creative City* critiques the art washing that certain cities have adopted in attempts to brand themselves as "Creative Cities". One way that city and state governments have attempted to control their branding is through the commissioning of projects through their public art commissions. In San Francisco the Arts Commission has revoked offers when the commissioners don't agree with the artists visions.⁵ This art washing is a neoliberal strategy in attempts to market such cities as "creative" neutralizing the protest of art in the process. Schacter in the end argues that artists must maintain their power and continue to disrupt the marketing of urban space through "urban intervention or experimentation" (Schacter pg. 170). Neoliberal commodification is the attempt

⁵ Lava Thomas was awarded a commission through the San Francisco Arts Commission to create a sculpture of Maya Angelou. Although, when she presented her idea for a non-figurative version of the memorial, they revoked the offer. <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/public-art-commission-controversies-new-york-san-francisco-1202696028/>

to privatize our urban spaces and market them through vicious means, as spaces in “their” control.

To further highlight the importance of urban space, we must look how the museum functions as a private holder of art space. In Paul DiMaggio’s study *in Are Art-Museum Visitors Different from Other People? The Relationship between Attendance and Social and Political Attitudes in the United States* he found that often the attendees of museums are liberal leaning, higher educated, and overall come from more affluent backgrounds. From these findings it can be rationalized that once a work of resistance art is put in a museum it loses a large part of its audience, those whom I would argue gain more benefit in the viewing of resistance art. In museums political nuances lose significance once they become neutralized and are portrayed to relatively comfortable audiences. This study helps bring attention to the importance of urban space and resistance art because it unapologetically informs the everyday citizen without direct intent. Thus, even as resistance art may be becoming commodified it still lays claim to urban spaces for the public, try as they will but the street will not become a museum.

These authors have raised valuable arguments in warning us of the neoliberal commodification of space, although it should be noted that resistance art in urban space plays a valuable role in reclamation protest and political uprisings. Urban space is where the masses congregate, discuss, and develop belonging. Resistance art stimulates political and social thought within urban spaces as form of reclamation. Waldron and Dobratz in their study on *Graffiti as a Form of Contentious Political Participation* contend that graffiti is a form that “1)

provides an entry into the public discourse of ideas that are ignored by other media; (2) provides an individual with the opportunity to publicly voice controversial ideas; and (3) provides marginalized persons a venue.” (Waldron and Dobratz pg. 382). The use of graffiti is an example of an everyday action that expresses the will for change, especially in marginalized settings. Taking the ideas that Poposki, Waldron and Dobratz, Schacter, and Youkhana have developed about urban space and the principles of resistance art we can conclude that urban space is 1) a unique place in society that is form to all, 2) urban space under certain conditions can be monopolized and commodified, 3) the use of street art can help reclaim urban spaces that have been monopolized and commodified.

There have been a variety of case studies that explore how urban space has been used in globalized cities. Namely, Youkhana has explored a case sensitive approach of belonging in the neighborhood of Lavapies in Madrid. While Poposki dives into the experience of resistance art in post-socialist Skopje, and Camila Trumper explores the use of resistance art in the political arena of neoliberal and post neoliberal Chile. These case studies have developed a platform for exploration in the usage of urban space and resistance art.

Youkhana in the analyzation of Lavapies, a working-class immigrant neighborhood, highlights how resistance art is used in its urban spaces to develop a sense of belonging or home. Madrid is global city that in the wake of the 1990 neoliberal wave began industrializing its city, removing nonproductive industries, and transforming its city center into a space of consumption and tourism creating a hub for business and commerce. The urban renaissance of Madrid gentrified and transformed many working class and immigrant

neighborhoods. The community of Lavapies has protested this gentrification through developing creative political acts of resistance, notably through resistance art. Youkhana eloquently points out that “the use of the urban structure dissolves social boundaries and forms a situated togetherness that intersperse with the restricted notions of collective ethnic or national belongings.” (pg. 181). The community of Lavapies stood together against the neoliberal tiger of gentrification and developed spaces of belonging through resistant art creation in their urban spaces.

Another example of the usage of urban space and resistance art to battle the neoliberal capitalist commodification of space is illustrated in Poposki’s examination of post-socialist Skopje. Skopje is a city located in North Macedonia. As the capitalist market emerged in Macedonia the government has encountered an increase in outdoor advertisements, namely billboards, in its city center. This increase in legal and illegal⁶ advertising billboards has monopolized and disrupted urban space. Artists have responded to this overpopulation in various forms of activism⁷. This elaborates upon the ideas of Henri Lefebvre on the *Production of Space*, highlighted in Alex Loftus novel *Everyday Environmentalism: Creating an Everyday Urban Political Ecology*. Urban spaces often start as “representations of space”, but through their use people appropriate them, socially producing a “representational space” (Poposki, pg. 718). Both Loftus and Poposki highlight

⁶ There where license issued for about 400 legal billboards in Skopje, but city authorities believe there are over 600 billboards present. The author recorded 81 advertising billboards in just one city block. (Poposki, pg. 716-717)

⁷ Poposki defines Artivism: as an action directed to creating change through the medium and resource of art.

the philosophies of space, explaining the impact that resistance art has had on the finite urban spaces of cities. In Skopje artist created representational spaces through posters⁸, billboards⁹, and 3D street installations¹⁰. These various forms of activism are attempts to interrupt the everyday thought of the public, stimulating participation and discussion in how urban space is used. They interrupt the flow of information, developing dynamic citizens. As Acconci is quoted in Poposki “Public Art exists to thicken the plot”.

The last case study to draw upon explores the history of urban space reclamation and resistance art in Chile, and how it has impacted their socio-political movements. Camilo Trumper investigates this “Revolution from Below” as street art has proven to be an essential political practice for Chileans. In 2019 an explosion of protests erupted throughout Chile, the *Estallido* or uprising, began in conjunction with politically charged debates on the streets. 2019 was not the first time that resistance art inspired revolt. Throughout the late twentieth century during the US sponsor coup d’état of Allende and after into Pinochet dictatorship Chileans used resistance art. Chileans have developed resistance art in the following context,

Chileans recast street art and public writing as a clandestine political practice, a furtive means of communication that could turn the very structures of repression and censorship into a support and cover for an ongoing political dialogue that took place in public and semi-public arenas. In so doing, everyday Chileans rebuilt structures of political organizing, crafted nimble languages of political debate and imagined themselves, again, as political citizens (Trumper pg. 2)

⁸ “Alternative Economics, Alternative Societies” - Oliver Ressler

⁹ “Right to the City” (2008-2010) – Zoran Poposki

¹⁰ “Territories” – Igor Toševski

Chilean citizens have championed the use of resistance art in creating political and social change. Even as their government has attempted to whitewash the walls of the city, Chileans have developed creative strategies in resistance art and to this day continue to enact major change.

The usage of urban spaces evolves according to local politics, social movements, and community participation. As illustrated through the various case studies and theories there is no linear explanation to how and why urban spaces are occupied in various ways, but through an intersectional lens we can begin to understand the instances of urban space usage within San Francisco and Buenos Aires.

The Everyday Person: But who is an artist really?

This final section belongs to introduce the reader with the artist, the face behind the form. The artist is a participant in the everyday, in capitalistic form the artist motif is a state of being that both produces and consumes.

To begin I invite us to meditate on the art of 'consuming' as this becomes an artistic practice in the urban space when encountering various mediums of resistance art. Alex Loftus uses the teachings of French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre to illustrate how the everyday life of a citizen, becomes part of the revolution. In Loftus's book *Everyday Environmentalism: Creating an Urban Political Ecology* he begins chapter five with an invitation, a quote from Henri Lefebvre:

Critique of the everyday life encompasses a critique of art by the everyday and the critique of the everyday by art. It encompasses a critique of the political realms by the everyday social practice and vice versa (Loftus pg. 109)

This critique comes from urban citizens, as we are the ones experiencing the everyday. As citizens that encounter resistance art, we gain power in being able to critique the everyday, the art we encounter, and the socio-political statements that these encounters explore.

Critique is an artistic exercise that we all practice in our everyday encounters, through the philosophy of moments. To further explain let's consider Lefebvre's ponderings of the moment, a phenomenon that we all experience. A moment is "the attempt to achieve the total realization of a possibility" (Loftus pg. 119). In one moment, our perception can alter, our reality can shift. Further evolving this thought, Loftus mediates on the festival moment.

The festival moment is a moment in which our stream of consciousness is interrupted. A festival moment, which I liken to any profound works of resistance art, serves as a disruptive moment that preludes shifts in perception. Taking the moment, establishing what creates the festival, and then considering our place as artists in the critique we can realize our places along the artist spectrum. It takes a profound and creative mind to analyze moments and draw socio-political conclusions. We all have the innate ability to adopt this mindset, and resistance art brings upon such a festival moment that often we do so without realization. Perceiving is an art, and we are all artist in perceiving becoming one with the resistance.

Less profoundly bell hooks considers the practice of consumption and production in a constructive analysis through her book *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics*. In her essay chapter *Beauty Laid Bare: Aesthetics in the Ordinary* hooks honors Lefebvre's philosophies of the everyday critique in stating,

Learning to see and appreciate the presence of beauty is an act of resistance in a culture of domination that recognizes the production of a pervasive feeling of lack, both material and spiritual, as a useful colonizing strategy (pg. 134).

By learning to critique the everyday through profound festival moments triggered by resistance art is a practice that can be adopted by all. When we learn to see and appreciate the festival moment, the everyday beauty we are participating in an everyday revolution. In her book, hooks explores the works of Felix Gonzalez-Torres. As an artist by economic terms, his groundbreaking work in art that expresses its significance through the moment of the experience, he embraces the passion of remembrance. In the essay *Subversive Beauty: New Modes of Contestation* hooks explains Felix's work as a sculpture, and photographer ruminating on his ability to make the subject feel. He creates art that make us "identify ourselves as subjects in history through our interactions with the work" (hooks pg. 50). bell hooks highlights two very important points for us here in her book, the power in perceiving beauty and the impact of the experience through art. Again, both the perception and viewing are works of art.

The consumer, producer interactions make resistance art irreplicable in the resistance as it places moments of festival in our daily walks, our daily interactions. As everyday citizens our interactions with art on the walls is what gives this medium of resistance its power. The ability to consciously recognize the impacts of what we are viewing is imperative in the struggle. As highlighted by Gonzalez -Torres some artists are explicitly introducing festival moments into our everyday lives, making the critique easier, whereas others are doing it rather implicitly. As everyday citizens our perceptions of resistance art are ultimately the most powerful aspect of these interactions.

Methods Statement

To answer the question of “how are artists using public space differently as political forms of resistance in San Francisco and Buenos Aires” I will be cross examining the resistance art records of Graffitimundo in Argentina with the archives of Clarion Alley Mural Project and Paint the Void in San Francisco. I will be examining the evolution of artistic responses chronologically selecting examples of art from the early 2000s, the 2010s, the 2015s, and then the years of the pandemic (2020-2022). I will be contextualizing my selections of resistance art with hand selected news articles. To begin I will examine these records through the lens of demographic change in the cities. To understand, record, and assess the change in demographics over the past twenty years, I will be analyzing the rhetoric in a variety of journalistic articles. My criteria in choosing these articles are as follows: concerns respective city evolution, contains definitive opinion statements or innuendos, and speaks of relevant socio-political events. This will assess how the rhetoric and demographic of the city has evolved over the years and will define the lens in which I look at the various archived pieces. I am hoping that through this comparison of rhetoric, archived images, and my interpersonal research that I can begin to define the intersection between socio-political change i.e., gentrification, demographic change, and resistance art. In doing this I hope to be able to illustrate how artists are using resistance art in urban spaces to address socio-political evolutions.

I have conducted a series of interviews/conversations to develop an interpersonal understanding of street art and what roles these various collectives and individuals play in the development of urban spaces. I have asked these collectives a series of questions to develop an

insider understanding of the changes that these collectives have witnessed and recorded over the past twenty years. I will be using their responses to help contextualize the different experiences of resistance art in their respective cities. In addition to these conversations, I also attended a symposium at the SFMOMA “The Art of Murals” which consisted of different presentations and panels that discussed the history of street art the contemporary implications of resistance art in San Francisco. In Buenos Aires I attended a graffiti art tour with Graffitimundo learning about the different artist collectives and histories that inspired resistance in the city.

Using this data, I will complete a final comparison of two cities and their usage of urban space. I will be analyzing the characteristics of the resistance art experience through phenomenological reasoning. Phenomenology is a method of inquiry that emphasizes the perception and understanding of objects and events through the human conscious. It privileges first the experience of observation and perception before anything independent of human consciousness. Ultimately, I will be able to delineate the differences in these cities’ usage of urban space, and then issue recommendations of how to recognize and support the usage of urban space in the everyday conversation.

My limitations exist in the inability to personally see the changes that have occurred in these neighborhoods throughout the past twenty years. I have only been able to experience these neighborhoods for a finite amount of time: January 2022 – July 2022 in Argentina and August 2019 – October 2022 in San Francisco. There is also the limitation in the geographic locations of my study. I was able to explore every instance of street art in the city, and every neighborhood has a different approach to the types of street art they tolerate. Another

limitation exists in the time constraints of my study, I couldn't personally contact each individual artists and ask them about their personal experiences navigating the shifting socio-political and demographic changes over the years.

In regard to my limitation in working with archived materials there were minimal options between the years of 2000-2012 in both the archived collections of Graffitimundo and CAMP. My elections of resistant art samples while relevant were selected from a much smaller archive than I had originally intended. I am under the assumption that most likely there were more provocative images at the time, but these were not as well documented. Likewise, I was unable to find a wide range of achieved new publications from within Argentina. I had originally intended to select articles strictly from Buenos Aires news outlets, but because of the lack of achieves in the early 2000s I was unable to do so. The last limitation that I must highlight is my language level in Spanish, I am proficient in Spanish but not a native speaker, so there could be some misinterpretations. I have done my best to properly translate all articles and photos that I have taken.

My qualifications in conducting this experience lays in my position as an everyday citizen that has spent lengthy amounts of time exploring the streets of San Francisco and Buenos Aires. I have observed resistance art with the lens of an everyday citizen experiencing urban space in its raw and everchanging form. From these observations I will be able to use my experience to develop a vocabulary rooted in phenomenology. With my experience and vocabulary this research will be conducted and record at the street level. Thus, is how we will answer the question of how artists are using public space differently as political forms of resistance in San Francisco and Buenos Aires.

Findings

San Francisco in the Early 2000s

San Francisco experienced its first dot com boom in the late 1990s, early 2000s. Thousands of tech workers and a multitude of tech companies made the move to San Francisco forever changing the landscape and demographics of the city. This wave of newcomers was not new to the city, San Francisco has always been known for its ever-evolving citizenship. It has been a home for many immigrant communities, artists, and religious groups seeking refuge in a progressive atmosphere. What was different about the first dot com boom was the money that came with the tech companies. This money brought in a different attitude towards community and development to San Francisco.

A city that had prided itself on its diverse and progressive edge had opened up to a new demographic, the wealthy (majority) white working class. This new group of people sought to settle in neighborhoods that embodied the grunge artistic San Francisco flair. One of these sought-after neighborhoods was the Mission District. I had the opportunity to speak with Megan Wilson the co-director of CAMP, as well as an artist, writer, and activist. Clarion Alley Mural Project works within an alley that sits between Valencia and Mission St in the heart of the Mission district. In our email exchanges I was able to inquire about the non-profits experience with gentrification and demographic evolutions. Megan Wilson informed me that since the early 2000s,

The demographic has changed significantly, the area that CAMP is located in primarily a mix of working class Indigenous / American Indian, and immigrant communities, including Latinx, Arab, Pacific Islander, and Asian, and primarily multigenerational

families. It is now far whiter and more Asian upper - high income, with households that are 1-2 people, and in their twenties and thirties.

CAMP has recorded these changes through their experiences working in the community as the organization has been around since 1992. This organization has been able to document many of the murals and graffiti works that have been done in Clarion Allery over the years.

Notably, the demographic changes that began in lieu of the dot com boom was not immune to protest. By the early 2000s the resistance and reactions to the dot com boom became prominent in mainstream media. In 2005 Tim Redmond a journalist for the *San Francisco Bay Guardian* wrote the article "The Attack of the Million-Dollar Development Condos" This article sheds light on the impact that the dot com boom had on the physical city, and in turn the community within the city. Recurring throughout the article are words like developers, community, and a variety of finance terms setting the tone for a critical look into the new development and development plans that had become part of the conversation. Redmond's use of words like "big concrete monster" further illustrates the stance that he, the *Bay Guardian* staff, and many local San Franciscans had at the time against the development. This article looks first to the past, recounting the times before the dot com boom and the fight against the Manhattanization of San Francisco. It then recounts the present-day fight against the condos and high marketed development plans that both the city and developers were pushing, specifically on 3rd street a stretch into the Mission Bay. Finally, Redmond turns to the future posing this poignant question,

Nobody seriously thought about whether the consequences of the widespread displacement that accompanied the dot-com boom was worth what turned out to be a very short-term gain. And now, with everyone in town talking about a housing crisis,

very few people are asking the real question: who are we building all these million-dollar condos for – and is that the kind of city San Francisco wants to be? (Redmond)

Richmond's article highlights the transitional phase that the city found itself in the early 2000s.

Locals who had called San Francisco home for decades faced with a budding new community and culture in the city. The dot com boom brought expensive tech companies and wealthy employees. This radically changed how developers viewed the Bay and in turn highlighted the influence of money within city politics and planning.

The media played a large role in investigating and explaining the changes that were happening in the city during the early 2000s, but the artists were the ones to bring the resistance to the streets. In September of 2003 the Indonesian collective Apotik Komik worked in collaboration with CAMP to paint the mural *In Money We Trust* (Figure 1.1). CAMP commissioned this mural in the Mission district of San Francisco. The Mission district, as referenced above, was and is a hot spot for development in the city



Fig 1. *In Money We Trust*, by Apotik Komik. Photograph by CAMP

This collaboration was inspired by comics and imagery found in the public sphere i.e., conspicuous instances of resistance art like graffiti and paste-ups. This collective also drew from their experiences living on the periphery of capitalism using a socially active approach that opens, educates, and transforms the communities they live and paint in. Contextually, Indonesia was industrializing in the late 20th century, and companies like NIKE etc. were “commercially” colonizing their country. The artists were able to draw from their experiences, seeing what big corporations and an increasing wealth gap could do to communities. This mural depicts a sequence of scenes with the same man worshipping money, fighting over money, and losing sleep over money. This mural mirrors the feelings that most of the San Francisco community had begun to grapple with in the wake of the dot com boom. In conjunction with Richmond’s article, we can infer that high-end development had begun to overtake many working-class neighborhoods. The new development contributed to rising living prices; and the people who had called San Francisco home for many years were either being forced from their homes or conditioned to value money and the access to money at a considerably higher level. When prices rise money becomes contentious, people become obsessed like the man depicted in this mural. This mural when meditated upon is a warning to the community about the power and influence of capitalism. During the tenure of this mural¹¹, the everyday citizen was reminded of the powers that were developing during this period, and the capitalistic legacy of the early 2000s in San Francisco.

¹¹ This mural was located across from Southern Exposure Gallery, but it was taken down in 2013 due to old age and the relocation of the gallery.

San Francisco 2009 give or take

Speculation of the next dot com boom in the Bay Area began not long after the dust settled, and the activists had time to breath. In the early twenty teens the rise of social media tech giants commenced. The influence and money of social media networks brought with it further gentrification of the city. In 2013 *The Bay Area Guardian* released an issue that highlighted the eviction crisis that had begun in the city. In the article “Out of Place” by Rebecca Bowe and Dylan Tokar, the journalists explored the impacts of the Ellis eviction crisis, the root of many displacement struggles.

As defined in the article the Ellis act was “enacted in 1986, the state law allows a landlord to stop renting units, evict all tenants, and sell the building for another purpose” (Bowe and Tokar). During the second dot com boom many developers were using this law to evict many long-term tenants so that they could flip their buildings into condos for the new wealthier tech class. This article is an exposé into the trenches of displacement in San Francisco. The authors found that between 1986 and 1995 just 29 Ellis evictions were filed with the San Francisco Rent board. In 1999- 2000 that number increased to 440 and just in the 2012-2013 fiscal year they had recorded 81, double that of the previous year. Local renters were being displaced at an alarming rate. Developers were often targeting communities that have been marginalized, illegal, or powerless. This article does well in communicating how the communities who had moved to San Francisco for its art, culture, and freedom were increasingly being marginalized in their own city by tech, tech money and developers. Bowe and Tokar eloquently state, using the words of Rebecca Solnit a publisher from the London Review, what the eviction crisis puts at risk,

all this is changing the character of what was once a great city of refuge... It has become increasingly unaffordable over the past quarter century, but still has a host of writers, artist, activists, environmentalists, eccentrics and other who don't work sixty-hour weeks for corporations – though we may be a relic population (Bowe and Tokar)

During my interview with Megan Wilson from CAMP she reiterated this sentiment. When asked about the displacement and evictions of local community, also known as gentrification, they explained that once the city started experiencing hypergentrification that extremes began to exist in every way, and this has created suffering on all ends of the spectrum. The people who have moved in were upset because they must exist within a city of unhoused peoples due to development displacement. As Megan stated in our exchange,

They [the newcomers] hate walking around the city and seeing all of the people they've displaced living on the streets and they hate having to dodge human shit, urine, and trash everywhere. And the city has not and is not investing enough for housing and services for folks with very low incomes and living in poverty, including many families, who are now on the streets.

And vice versa, those that have been displaced are upset because they have been pushed from their homes and on to the streets. Additionally, they are seeing their community being actively appropriated and gentrified. These citizens began to take to the streets to express their frustrations.

Quickly, the streets became a hotspot for gentrification protest, implicitly and explicitly in this era. In 2010 Emily Butterfly painted the mural *The Same Wind that Uproots Trees* (Figure 2) in response to the eviction crisis.



Fig 2. *The Same Wind that Uproots Trees*, by Emily Butterfly. Photograph by CAMP

It is my interpretation as an everyday citizen that the title of the painting, which also is featured as the banner in the painting, is the beginning stanza of a Rumi quote¹². The quote is as follows:

The same wind that uproots trees makes the grass shine. The lordly wind loves the weakness and lowness of grasses. Never brag of being strong. The axe doesn't worry how thick the branches are. It cuts them to pieces. But not the leaves. It leaves the leaves alone (Rumi)

As an everyday citizen I perceive the wind in this quote, and in the mural to be the developers and the landlords invoking the Ellis act to displace locals. The grass in the quote is the local community, they are strong, but the wind is more connected and preys on the weaknesses of the local communities. These communities are strong in culture and community, they have the spirit of the fight deeply entrenched in their networks. Many developers' prey on this strength, evicting those that stand the strongest in protest against the overtaking of their communities.

¹² Rumi, was a 13th-century Persian poet, Hanafi faqih, Islamic scholar, Maturidi theologian and Sufi mystic originally from Greater Khorasan in Greater Iran

The woman in the center of the mural is wrapped in the new condos that are taking over the city, another symbol of how the new development is uprooting the local community. To the everyday citizen mural appears to be a simple ode to a beautiful woman and some abstract homes; although, the moment after it catches your eye, this mural is a dedicated protest to the crisis at hand. Mark Harris spoke to me about this use of implicit protest in San Francisco resistance art. He said because of the commission process, and the overall censorship in the city many artists lean towards creating works that do not directly address the issue at. Although as Emily Butterfly so eloquently exhibits for us through this piece it is possible to weave in dissent in subtle ways, such as, the Rumi quote or the defining characteristic of the woman. Ultimately, this mural seamlessly upholds the strength and beauty of the community, all the while highlighting the power and ruthlessness of the developers and gentrification.

San Francisco in response to the 2015ish Conservative Rise

In November of 2016 Donald Trump was elected president, a far-right candidate who was known for his sexist and racist commentary. He issued travel bans on Muslim majority countries, signed executive orders against sanctuary cities, and insisted veraciously on building a wall between Mexico and the United States.

On the eve of Trump's inauguration in 2017 hundreds of people took to the street of San Francisco protesting Trump insensitive laws, fighting under the #NoBanNoWall mantra. Sana Saleem published an article through *48hills*, an independent online publication in San Francisco covering the protests and the different stake holders in this fight. In the article “#NoBanNoWall: Hundreds continue to protest Trump’s Muslim Ban” Saleem interviews persons who were

partaking in the protests. People were scared, many interviewees in this article talk about the fear of deportation, and the anxiety of how these laws will affect them and their children. Many of the interviewees knew peoples being detained, recounting stories of Mothers and children being separated at the border, and school children riddled with anxiety of the threatened separation of their families. They expressed the thoughts and feelings of those who have traveled to this country for a better life, those who support peoples who have fought for their rights to this country, and those who will fight even under hard right presidents to maintain their claim to the United States.

The protesters highlighted in Saleem's article were only a microcosm of the protests and revolutions that happened during the four fraught years of Trumps presidency. Many artists took to the streets to illustrate the anger and injustice that the nation felt during these years. In July of 2018 artist and performer Cliff Hengst painted a mural in Clarion Alley called *Justice*. Featured in this mural are a multitude of protest signs, expressing sentiments against the ideology of hard right and repressive regimes both within the private and public sector. On the signs are different protest slogans that have been popularized and mainstreamed over the years. This is a mural that immediately catches the eye of the everyday citizen artist as most people can identify at least one of the popularized slogans. In the everyday this mural inspires activism and alludes to revolution, always fighting for justice even in the darkest of times. While viewing this mural I see an ode to the protest culture within San Francisco, as it can inspire the activist and instill a fight in the community.



Fig 3. *Justice* by Cliff Hengst Photographed by CAMP

Notably this mural has been vandalized at least 11 times, specifically a target for a Make America Great Again attack, the vandals painting MAGA hats on all the protesters (CAMP). *Justice* has become a living work, with multi-dimensional discussion and protest. During this period social justice projects that began rooted in humanity had become politicalized and people were reacting to dissent rather aggressively.

The other noteworthy vandalization that occurred to this mural, and a handful of other murals in the alley over the years¹³, was the blacking out of the Free Palestine sign. Zionist hate crimes continue to be an issue within this alley and again are a strong example of just how powerful resistance art can be in invoking reaction. The politicization of art comes from the

¹³ As of most recently CAMP withdrew from an exhibit at the San Francisco Public Library because of censorship against the Arab Liberation Mural. This mural has a Zionism is Racism sign in it. A sign that has been vandalized, and now is being censored from the exhibit from the library.

interpretation of the everyday artist (viewer), it is explicit murals like this one that inspires people to consider their beliefs, consider others' beliefs, and question the powers that be.

ZE PANDEMIA

In March of 2020 the world forever changed. Covid-19 swept across the world. Small businesses closed their doors, neighbors stopped intermingling, and we became increasingly digitalized -- our communities lost their vibrancy. The pandemic brought us pain and anxiety, but it also brought a slowness to life; many began reimagining the world we could live and participate in. A year after the beginning of the pandemic in February of 2021 Tim Redmond wrote the article, "We can reimagine the post-COVID San Francisco" for the *48 Hills* publication. This article was a call to action for those in San Francisco that have been fighting for an equitable city. Redmond begins the article talking about how Ben Swig (the owner of the Fairmont hotel) and various government agency heads in the 1950s created development plans to turn San Francisco into the next Manhattan. He then talks about how Mayor Ed Lee brokered deals with large tech companies raising rent and creating a developer's haven in the early 2000s. He uses this history to highlight the inequalities that the city itself has created over the years. In highlighting these inequalities, he is able to develop an idea of what a responsive and post Covid city should look like. Redmond argues that,

Maybe it's time for the Board of Supes to start convening a series of public hearings on the future of the city. There are so many brilliant people here who can help re-imagining San Francisco, so many creative thinkers who can talk about what sustainability means (and maybe it means slowing down growth). (Redmond)

During Covid many people looked to the city for guidance and support. As people became more acquainted with the government, the inequalities that had been promoted throughout the City for decades became apparent. There was contention, but during this time there was also profound hope that change could be made. As Richmond put it, through participation of the local community in decisions there was hope that we could develop practical and creative solutions. Many San Franciscans were inspired to take a step back and reevaluate, reimagine, and rethink the part that they play in creating the future.

Communities began responding and evolving to the times of the pandemic through street art. The presence of art in the streets represented a possible change in the city, as public art had not been encountered this spontaneously in a long time. The collaboration between artists and small business owners increased as they developed a symbiotic relationship. The business owners would provide blank spaces on their empty store fronts, and the artist would begin to reimagine, bringing color and shape back to the world.



Fig 4. *Relax Think Covid Free Thoughts*, by Mark Harris. Photograph by Paint the Void

Paint the Void, a San Francisco based nonprofit, began as a call to action among the artistic community. Paint the Void raised funds for artist grants throughout the pandemic, keeping artists engaged and paid during the shutdowns. One of the artists that Paint the Void sponsored was Mark Harris. Harris was sponsored to paint a mural on Haight Street (Fig 4). This mural is a rendition of a 1950s headache advertisement. During a conversation with Harris, he told me that he chose a retro design for this mural to catch the eye of the observer¹⁴. As an artist Harris hoped that through this mural, he could counteract the anxiety of the pandemic and encourage people to think beyond their current situation. The title of this mural is “Relax Think Covid-Free Thoughts”, alluding to a mentality that looks forward, past the present anxieties of Covid. The woman in the mural is forward facing seemingly peering in the future with a concentrated yet dreamy gaze, literally portraying the mentality of forward thinking. The emphasis on brain and

¹⁴ He compared this retro design to an old Chevy vs a Tesla. The old Chevy is obviously going to get more attention because of its rarity.

mask as they are layered on the top of the woman, is an indicator to the people that the mask and brain are one unit. They represent the interlinking of the consciousness, and conscious actions. In a statement Harris said that he believes that “if we can resist being hijacked by anxiety and think outside the tunnel vision of Covid, we are more likely to devise creative solutions to the social inequities highlighted by the pandemic”. During my conversation with Harris, he said that when he was creating this piece it provoked many people in the neighborhood. As he was painting Harris said that many people would come up and chat with him about his motive and messaging. The interaction between the art on the street and between producer and consumer is an excellent example of how interactive resistance art is. One conversation, one glance can lead to that provocative festival moment. Harris told me that he hoped to inspire people beyond the pandemic and that he did. This mural encourages the everyday person to pause and ponder. Not only is this mural a beautiful distraction in empty and anxiety filled streets, but it also inspires the everyday person to think beyond the state of their being.

Buenos Aires 2000's the Crisis to End all Crises

In December of 2001 the Argentina government declared the largest debt default in economic history. In the weeks that followed Argentina had five presidents in just one week, millions were unemployed, and those that could fled the country looking for stability elsewhere. Widespread protests became a part of everyday life and people began to look for other mediums of expression. The *New York Times* published an article in December of 2001 with the headline, “Unable to Control Protesters, Argentina's President Resigns”. The Argentina

crisis caught global attention when President Fernando de la Rúa resigned, in the article they illustrate the scene eloquently,

Mr. de la Rúa's government collapsed with surprising rapidity, as police fired shotguns at demonstrators in front of his palace, tear gas seeped into presidential offices and fires filled the grand boulevards and avenues of Buenos Aires with towers of black smoke (Krauss)

After his resignation the people had no trust in the banking systems or the government, looting and rioting became a means of survival. The protest slogan that filled the air during this time was "Que se vayan todos (they all must go), they wanted the government gone. This article does a good job of depicting the anarchy that preceded and proceeded the protests of 2001. In an interview with Cecilia one of the directors from Graffitimundo she told me that,

The economic crisis of 2001 was undoubtedly the event that marked a before and an after on the local scene. The social outbreak that brought the economic-financial debacle as a consequence, stressed the relationship that Argentina has with techniques such as stencil and written messages (perhaps the most popular was "they all must go"). From this moment arose collectives of artists like BsAs Stencil while collectives of artists like DOMA and PHASE who broke the monotony of the post-crisis depression with its colorful characters

When speaking to Argentines about the crisis, this sentiment was reiterated as they recounted stories of being in the streets with their families', neighbors, and friends protesting. No one knew what to do. They all told me tales of coming together and supporting each other through the crisis. In the documentary "White Walls Say Nothing" the artists said that coming together to paint collectively became a coping mechanism. This became a space of expression dissent and otherwise, there was nothing else and nowhere else to go so they turned to the walls.

During these months of instability many people expressed themselves through various forms. The resistance art forms that were produced during this time inspired artists for years to come. A unique style of resistance art that was developed in response to the 2001 crisis was

Muñecismo. On a tour with Graffitimundo they also explained to me that during the crisis groups of friends would get together and paint (May 2022). Often these painting sessions would occur at night, and they would paint an entire wall in just one night. The artists wanted to bring color to these dark times. They hoped their murals - characterized by bright colors, animated shapes, and unique characters would distract the everyday citizen, bringing some lightness to their days. Figure 5 is a photo that I took in the neighborhood of Colegiales, this mural was painted during one of these friend collaborations during the early 2000s. I would walk past this mural almost daily on my way to university and quite regularly there would be at least one person who physically stopped and pondered the scene, a dazzling distraction indeed. This mural is a soft form of protest, not explicit in content but explicit in its effect. The real protest in this mural lies in its ability to disrupt the traumas, anxieties, and doubts of the everyday citizen by injecting comedy, and light into the minds of the people.



Fig 5. *Unnamed by Pastel*. Photographed by Adeline Schmitz

Buenos Aires CFKs Passion

In 2007 Cristina Fernández de Kirchner was elected for her first term as President of Argentina. She served as the First Lady prior to this election, when her husband Nestor Kirchner served as president. Nestor helped carry Argentina out of the 2001 crisis, thus as Nestor's wife Cristina already had a large political following. Cristina was part of the populist pink wave in South America. As a populist leader, people either loved or despised her. Cristina is a radical politician with strong socialistic ideas on how the country should run. Five months after her husband Nestor suddenly passed away Cristina decided to run for her second term as president. The Argentina National Newspaper *El Pais* ran an article on Cristina's 2nd win titled "Histórica Victoria de Cristina Fernández de Kirchner". The reporters in this article have written an informative piece on the second presidential victory of Cristina. In 2011 she was reelected with over 50% of the vote. This is significant as Argentina is a multiparty system, meaning that she won the hearts and minds of over 50% of the population. As the article states, "Una victoria de Cristina Fernández de Kirchner tan apabullante le dará a la presidenta un control formidable del poder" (Gallego-Diaz and Rebossio)¹⁵. This consolidation of power fortifies her role as a Peronist leader¹⁶. Cristina is a rather controversial figure even today after the land slide victory in 2011. She is now serving as the Vice President of Argentina and still commands an intense following, wielding great influence over the current president.

Artists in Argentina took to the streets during the Kirchner period, creating resistance art that exhibiting both critical and supportive messaging. During Cristina's election there were many state

¹⁵ "Such an overwhelming victory for Cristina Fernández de Kirchner will give the president a formidable grip on power"

¹⁶ A Peronist is a supporter of Juan Peron a populist Socialist leader during the mid 1900s

sanctioned stencils that became popularized among Cristina's supporters at the time (Figure 6). This stencil in particular plays on Cristina's passion for her people as a Peronist. These stencils were made by artists and perceived by artists, but they ultimately were party sanctioned. As noted by the photographer, stencils like this one were common around the city. This was an explicit choice of Cristina's with the implement the stencil as a political tool. Cristina is the first politician that has used the stencil during a political campaign. The usage of the stencil was integral in Cristina's campaign, because it provided a quick and efficient means of communicating with the masses. The stencil presents an opportunity for politicians to communicate with the creative class as well as the everyday citizen, as it has become a revered popular culture creation. The cool factor attracts not only politically active minds but also those minds who are just interested in appearance. Ultimately, the use of the stencil in her political campaign speaks to the influence of street art. If street art did not profoundly speak to and influence the minds of the people, Cristina would not have used it to strengthen her campaign.



Fig 6. *Cris-Pasion Peronista* Photograph by Buenos Aires Street Art

The usage of stencils as a political tool while impactful, is a direct example of how resistance art and urban space can become monopolized. One way that artists have combated the monopolization of urban space is through the constant dialogue that is possible on the walls. Often times this dialogue is seen as vandalization; nevertheless, it is an example of how the messaging of one person impacted another person so strongly that they had to engage. Seen in Figure 7 is the dialogue between different artists. The original phrase in this photo was *Fuerza Cristina* (Strength to Cristina). An engaged and enraged citizen reacted to this phrase, spray painting over the “Z” making it *Fuera Cristina* (Cristina out). The dialogue happening on this wall also represents the dualistic feelings about Cristina: love or hate. This is a pertinent example of the power that resistance art can have on the everyday citizen. The dynamic interaction on the wall also signals to the everyday citizen that this is a contentious, dynamic, and contemporary conversation.



Fig 7. *Fuerza/Fuera Cristina* Photograph by Buenos Aires Street Art

Buenos Aires 2015: Macri the Man

In 2015 Mauricio Macri won the Argentinian presidential elections. He became the first President since El Gobierno Militar to be outside the Peronist party. His election was also significant as he beat out Cristina Fernandez de Kirchners hand-picked successor, ending the 12-year Kirchner rule. *The Guardian* released an analytic article titled “Mauricio Macri has won Argentina's presidency – but his work has just begun” in November of 2015 that breaks down the significance of Macri’s election and the goals of him and his supports. The election of Macri greatly upset many Kirchnerist and Peronist groups because Macri belongs to and represents the wealthy, white and conservative classes in Buenos Aires. The article highlights that the greatest disagreement between parties is on economic policy, Argentina under the Kirchners is rather socialistic providing many subsidies and social programs for the disadvantaged and marginalized, whereas Macri was concerned with reigning in inflation, foreign investments, and debt relief. The economic policies that Macri fought for mirrored that of Carlos Menem’s during the neoliberal years of the Washington consensus the proceeded the 2001 crisis. The similarities between the two frightened many Argentinians, and as the Guardian article predicted “He may have to deal with social resistance in the form of union protests or spontaneous social unrest, or unrest intentionally generated by the more radicalized Kirchnerist groups”. During his Presidency Marci fought protest and reencountered resistance in many realms of government evidently, he was unable to make another successful bid at reelection.

Following the election of Macri the people of Argentina once again took to the streets. A multitude of different techniques were used in the critique of this new right-wing government. The graffiti written in Figure 8 equates Macri’s new government with the mafia. An equation

that comes from the knowledge that many of Macri's closest allies received tax break and following Macri's exit from office many of them received large amounts of money from the government and have since moved out of Argentina. This writing signals to the perceiver that there is something more happening in the Argentine government and that there may be more scrutiny to be had at the events of the time.



Fig 8. *Macri = Mafia* Photograph By Escritos En La Calle

Another way that people experienced resistance art during the Macri years was through the ever so popularized stencils. In Figure 9 we see a stencil of a young John Lennon with the words "Basta Macri" printed on the front. Using John Lennon an iconic activist and artist to model this shirt is an ode to the modern-day activist who views this stencil and the modern-day artist who created this piece. Basta in Castellano¹⁷ is a slang term for enough or we've had it attitude. This stencil was most likely created later in Macri's presidency as the people became increasingly more fed up with Macri's performance as president. The resistance art that occurred during

¹⁷ Argentinians call their Spanish Castellano

Macri's presidency was extremely explicit and left little room for interpretation, the people were fed up.



Fig 9. *Basta Macri* Photograph by Escritos en la Calle

Buenos Aires Durante la Pandemia

During the global covid-19 pandemic Argentina faced not only a state of emergency because of the pandemic, but also a large socio-political crisis because of an impending IMF loan renegotiation. The citizens of Argentina were out of work because of the pandemic shut down, and the government was quickly running out of money to support their citizens. The *New York Times* published a special investigation article in April of 2021 titled "We Were Left with Nothing: Argentina's Misery Deepens in the Pandemic". Within this article they describe the state of the nation explaining that when the Pandemic hit Argentina was already in its third year of recession. The newly elected president Alberto Fernandez, a left to center Peronist, was seeking to negotiate with the IMF while attempting to be a champion for the disadvantaged and working classes. This article speaks of the frustration, fear, and uncertainty that many

Argentines felt during the early years of the pandemic. Unpredictable inflation has always been a part of the Argentine government, but since the pandemic the economy has been unbearably unpredictable leaving many Argentinians at a loss. The couple that was interviewed in this exposé had lived a frugal but supported life and now amid the pandemic they are left in uncertainty, as she quotes “I’m scared about what could happen now,” she said. “Everyone is very worried.”



Fig 10. *Poster Wall ft. Peterhaus* Photograph by Adeline Schmitz

The streets, what had been a vibrant and bustling space, became silent during the early weeks of the pandemic. Although the silence, did not last long as people quickly began creating. It should be noted that the revival of animation and color to the streets did not happen spontaneously with COVID as Cecilia from Graffitimundo notes in our conversation that,

In the last 20 years the neighborhood of Palermo changed drastically, and with it its demography. The urban art that began to appear at the beginning of the year 2000 gave a touch of color to its dark streets and of appearance even dangerous in many cases. Large stencils of Rundontwalk began to appear with their series of animals two meters high; many of the ancient passages of Palermo began to be intervened by groups of artists and friends on weekends, creating art corridors spontaneously.

For many years artists and friends have been disrupting urban space to create pockets of thought, of color. COVID became a catalyst for more provocative and casual experiences. On social media and in our everyday socializations we would often hear of friends who had painted on the walls the night before. Knowing or seeing tags and creations of resistance art by someone you knew was not uncommon at this time. The people became empowered through their creations, paste-ups became increasingly popular as depicted in Figure 10. I took this photo in June of 2022, about a year after the *New York Times* article was published, and a little over two years after the pandemic began in 2020. This is a photo of a paste up wall. There are many walls throughout the city like this, as it yet again become a space for artists to collaborate during crisis. The messaging on these walls were constantly evolving, artists would add different posters and stencils at whim. No single wall or day looked the same. On this wall specifically is a paste up from the Peterhaus Movement. These paste ups are characterized by simple phrases in black block letters and a white or rainbow background. The phrases are derived from different social-cultural movements. In an interview with Nokton Magazine Ale Giorgga the artist behind this movement states that the purpose of these posters is, “On the one hand, to make an impact on people and, on the other, to provoke a shock of reflection about what is communicated” (Astasio). During the pandemic paste up walls became a means of communication that did not involve intensive human contact yet provoked the everyday citizen to stop and ponder the work around them.

Another theme of paste ups that began circulating during with the pandemic was the cartooning of various socio- political strife’s. In Figure 11 the artist under the tag @quehacesmapache has created a poster that alludes to the past dollarization of the Argentine

peso and the current inflation crisis occurring in Argentina. Like the *New York Times* article, this poster discusses in visual form the economic problems that the country is fighting. At the current moment the US 100-dollar bill in Argentina is a hot topic due to the revitalized of blue dollar scheme under Alberto Fernandez's presidency.

The blue dollar scheme allows Argentinians to purchase US 100-dollar bills with their pesos to ensure that their money does not lose value. This is because of the unpredictable inflation rates that characterizes the Argentine economy. All large purchases within Argentina are done in US dollars, and the 100-dollar bill has become unofficially what Argentines use to save. In response to the 2001 crisis many Argentinians still do not trust banking systems, thus partake in the blue dollar scheme. The Blue Market scheme is a symptom of our capitalist system. A system that often relies on US intervention, and as scene in Argentina a direct reliance on the US monetary system. The dollars illustrated on this poster are mockups of the Monopoly Man, the Capitalist. The use of the Capitalist man draws the perceivers attention to the role that the US and in turn the capitalist agenda plays in Argentina. A good majority of the Argentinians economic security depends on the US dollar and thus this poster illicitly points out the dependency on the US dollar. The phrase at the bottom of the poster further highlights how the US and the western capitalistic agenda attempts to control Argentina. Translated to English this phrase says, "Your independence depends on me". With few words and simple animation this poster tells the tale of the current economic situation. To the everyday person this poster poses both a question and reflection. How can the Argentine economy become independent away from the influence of western institution? And to the foreigner, as I was when viewing

this poster, what implications do we have in perpetuating this paternalistic “your independence depends on me” attitude.



Fig 11. *@quehacesmanache* Photograph by Adeline Schmitz

Buenos Aires vs. San Francisco

Through the examination of these resistance art experiences it can be determined that in both cities’ resistance art has played a consistent role in responding to change. During every examined period we are able to delineate reasoning between the images on the wall and the words of the reporters. There is no doubt that resistance art exists in one defining capacity or another in each of these cities. The realities of the conversations on the walls though are wildly different. The monopolization of space, and the provocativeness of the art are defining characteristics in the differences between urban space and resistance art usage in Buenos Aires and San Francisco.

In Buenos Aires there is no designated space for resistance art. Walking the streets of the city one can become quite overwhelmed with the lack of organization on the walls. Recently, as noted by Cecilia from Graffitimundo, there has been a dramatic shift in the way that the city is viewing and using resistance art, as she explained up until 2008 one could not even google “street art in Buenos Aires”. She said that the scene has gone from completely independent and self-managed to becoming legitimized by at least some of the art institutes in Argentina. The legitimization and popularity of the resistance art in Buenos Aires does signal that there is an organizational attribute coming on to the scene. The recent presence of graffiti tours and collectives in popular art neighborhoods like Palermo and Boca are also indicators that the art community is organizing. It is too early to tell whether these organizations exist to control the message, or if that are merely a congregation of artists in a collective fight. All in all, many of the artists that interact on the walls of streets today are still expressing their own opinions and creating art independently, without oversight. Additionally, it should be noted the resistance art that appears on the walls of Buenos Aires remains there for extended amounts of time. There is no collective effort to cleanse the streets of this art. It is my belief that the existence of paste ups, and stencils have kept resistance art for the most part out of the privatized realm. Due to the quickness of application and ever evolving messaging platform these forms are able to exist outside regulation. The disorganization of the streets fosters an environment for continued contradiction and conversation, endlessly promoting opposing ideas.

Urban art space in Buenos Aires has not been commercialized and commodified to the extent that resistance art spaces have in San Francisco. The government-controlled

commissioning process within San Francisco has put stipulations on the creative freedoms of artists. In the streets of San Francisco, the majority of resistance art is curated to the likeness of the government and private commissioners' ideology. Spaces like Clarion Alley have become designated platforms for resistance art, and they fight to remain independent in their messaging away from the ideas and gaze of the government. I saw this phenomenon occurring in the Clarion Alley myself during the various times that I have visited the alley over the years. The first section of the alley is meticulously curated, whereas the second half of the alley while still covered in art is less curated and hot spot for underground street art. In the days that I visited Clarion Alley I noticed the curated section of the alley attracted many tourists and seemingly higher-class individuals. Whereas the latter half was occupied by groups hanging out listening to music and drinking beer along with curious individuals that have stepped beyond the curated facade of CAMPs commissioned area. This occurrences could also be due to the different relationships that CAMP has with property owners along the alley way. When I was discussing this phenomenon with Mark Harris, he confirmed my belief by saying that most of the provocative resistance art in the city is created by underground artists. Through my interview with Megan Wilson from CAMP she confirmed this by pointing out that many of the new people within San Francisco do enjoy the viewing elaborate murals but view underground works as a nuisance.

The government commissioning process plays an important role in the organization and monopolization of space in San Francisco. The SFMOMA hosted the Art of Murals Symposium in October of 2022. This symposium invited a variety of San Francisco Street Artists to speak on the birth and evolution of Street Art in the city. Many of these street artists expressed their

frustrations in have to conform with the ideas and messaging of a commission board. I found this striking and completely telling as increasing amounts of the urban space now is being controlled through government artistic commissions. These commissions restrict the artists and control the messaging. During my conversation with San Francisco based Artist Mark Harris, I asked him if it was a priority for other artists to create art that had provocative political or social messaging. He told me that there were a lot less artists than he wished creating provocative art, explaining that the majority of artists creating overtly responsive pieces work underground are not sponsored by the city or other organizational groups.

The resistance art that exists with in San Francisco swings along a pendulum of government commissioned pieces that exists because the powers that be are wanting to convey a particular message, and then local collectives that want to combat this controlled messaging. Regardless the organization of this space can foster hostile environments for the marginalized everyday citizen artist. These processes can disincentives artists with minimal connections and resources. All in all, the urban space in San Francisco in comparison to Buenos Aires is much more organized and restrictive.

The organization of urban space and the presence of commissioned spaces diminish the proactiveness of resistance art. As seen in my examples above much of the murals that respond to socio-political movements in San Francisco are curated to an extent and don't always contain explicit content making it a softer form of protest. In comparison the resistance art in Buenos Aires remains extremely provocative, outwardly questioning the powers that be. The usage of Muñecismo is the softest form of protest that we have seen in the examination of Buenos Aires. And yet this form is intended to be implicit in protest to the explicit anxieties and uncertainties.

The explicitly of resistance art in these cities can be directly linked to the freedom of urban space usage. Regardless of the restrictions we see many San Francisco artists continue to work outside these boxes, or in the very least working from the inside out attempting the beauties of protest from within the confines of our system.

As we conclude we can assume now that artists in Buenos Aires use urban space to develop provocative instances of resistance art. The past histories of oppression and uncertainty have given rise to a population of peoples who engage in instigating hard conversations on the streets. Contrastingly, artists in San Francisco attempt to address political and social issues with soft resistance and aesthetically appealing murals, they play into the flirtation of progress that the other institutions of the city similarly promote. The use of urban space by artist in these cities are directly linked with their histories and tolerance of the consumers.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to answer the question of how artists are using urban space as political forms of resistance in Buenos Aires and San Francisco. I have explored the history of these cities, investigating the different ways that artists have responded to political and social change over the past twenty years.

Through this investigation I have determined the following similarities between urban space use in Buenos Aires and San Francisco. The existence of these cities as progressive and creative cities links their abilities to promote change on their streets. The similarities between these cities lay in their roots in the Mexican Muralism Movement, as well as the presence of resistance art that provokes thought, instigating the festival moment.

Differentially speaking, within San Francisco resistance art occurs on multiple levels. The government attempts to control messaging through commissioned processes which can result in pieces that contain deep social messaging, where the nuances can be lost in the perception of the work. Additionally, there is a counter movement of localized collective that combats this attempt with their own organization of space. All in all as an everyday citizen I believe that the people are less willing to accept the protest messaging in San Francisco when it is explicit. Harris also affirmed my thoughts on this matter as we talked about San Francisco's reputation of being a progressive city, once you pull back the veil you see that it is a city with progressive themes and messaging. This city flirts with the radical ideas of change yet, as exemplified with its resistance art, it does not want to face the provocative call for change.

In Buenos Aires we have seen through the different instances of stencils, paste ups, and muñecismo that the street art is not curated to the extent of San Francisco. The provocative use of these different resistance art methods alludes to their past of oppression and turbulence. The artists, both the consumers and producers, in Argentine are determined to have their voices heard through the conversation on the walls. The collectives in Buenos Aires do not exist to be boards of commissioners, but as documenters and educators of the resistance art scene. One of the most unique aspects of the street art in Buenos Aires is the use of resistance art methods by political figures, such as Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. The streets talk so loudly in Buenos Aires that the politicians have sought to add their voices to the conversation. Resistance art in Buenos Aires exists to provoke.

Moving forward as we consider our roles in the usage of urban space; it is important to note our positions as participants in the everyday critique. We have the innate ability to engage

with all experiences of resistance art, it is through our daily commutes about urban spaces in which we can partake in this form. As bell hooks said “To be political is to be alive and that beauty resides in moments of revolution and transformation”. Making the conscious choice to engage with a piece of resistance art is the first step in revolution. It is our responsibility as urban citizens to engage with these conversations on the wall. To mediate upon the messaging, to partake in a festival moment, that is a provocative act that can only expand our perceptions. In conjunction with the engagement of resistance art we must also mediate upon the significance of the differing uses and controls of urban space. What does it mean for one city to have an exuberantly unorganized urban space palette, when another tightly controls the usage and messaging of theirs. What does this say about creative freedom? Creative thought? To conclude I invite us all to engage critically in the development and usage of our urban spaces, what is the art telling us.

Las políticas están en todas partes

-Rosabel

We simply have to look

Appendix

Interview Questions with Clarion Alley Mural Project

1. Can you provide an example of how graffiti has changed in your neighborhood over the past twenty years?
2. Are there specific social or political reasons that you think have influenced a change in the graffiti culture in the past 20 years? Which events?
3. Are most of the artists you work with local to the neighborhood, or have they moved in?
4. Has the demographic of the neighborhood changed in the past 20 years?
5. What do people in the neighborhood think about graffiti now? Has the opinion changed over the years?

Spanish Translation of Interview Questions for Graffitimundo

- 1) Puedes decirme como ha grafiti cambio en tu barrio durante los últimos veinte años?
Tienes ejemplos?
- 2) ¿Hay razones política o social que tiene una influencia en el cambio de grafiti en los último veinte años? ¿Qué eventos?
- 3) ¿En general, los artistas que trabajas con son porteños o de otros lugares y mudaron a Palermo?
- 4) ¿Ha cambiado la demografía de Palermo en los últimos veinte años?
- 5) ¿Qué piensan las personas en Palermo sobre grafiti ahora? ¿Había un cambio en opiniones?

Interview Questions with Mark Harris

- 1) What effect or message were you trying to convey with your mural “Don’t Worry Think Covid Free Thoughts”?
- 2) Did you notice people interacting with your mural? What were the reactions if any?
- 3) Is the street art in San Francisco responding to gentrification?
- 4) Have you noticed more provocative work in other American cities?
- 5) Do many artists in your community create street art that has political or social connotations? Or are they mostly concerned with aesthetics?

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