Introduction

This work is bookended by two exceptional political moments in recent Chilean history: a state of emergency and a state of catastrophe. The state of emergency declared by center-right Chilean president Sebastián Piñera in the wake of a night of violent protests on 18 October 2019 was accompanied by the heavy presence of the military on the streets and daily curfews. Across Chile, thousands of people came out in full force to show their support for the protests, demonstrating in the streets and banging on pots and pans. Excessive violence on the part of the military and the police only served to inflame passions further. The *estallido social*, as it came to be known—the social uprising or social explosion—was marked by a remarkable outpouring of creative energy: massive protests and demonstrations, wall art and graffiti, performance art pieces and protest songs, and feminist interventions. For five months, the Chilean state tried unsuccessfully to take back the streets. It was only with the arrival of the global pandemic of COVID-19 in South America that the government managed to regain control of the country. On 18 March 2020, exactly five months after the start of the uprising, President Piñera declared a ninety-day “state of catastrophe.” As soon as Santiago entered lockdown mode, the government took to the streets to clean up the graffiti-covered walls and statues in the city center. In the next few months, virtually all traces of the social unrest documented in this book disappeared.

*The Walls of Santiago* covers this five-month period of sociopolitical turmoil through an examination of the protest graphics that covered the walls of the nation’s capital. We focus mostly on the commercial center (Santiago Centro) and adjacent residential barrios (neighborhoods) in the comunas (districts or municipalities) of Providencia and Ñuñoa. Other areas of the capital generated political and graphic expression of the social unrest as well, but it was the city’s commercial center and its middle-class districts that emerged as the epicenter of the protests and generated the most iconic graphic images during the *estallido*. The book is organized around a series of original color photographs of the social revolution’s central graffiti tags, posters, murals, and montages. We use these images as a way to interpret the contemporary unrest but also as portals into longer struggles, in particular the student, feminist, and indigenous movements that have mobilized since the country’s transition to democracy. At the same time, we locate various aspects of contemporary political discourse, activism, and aesthetic strategies in the short-lived experiment with socialist democracy under Salvador Allende (1970–73) and the brutal dictatorship under General Augusto Pinochet (1973–90) that succeeded it. We also place the historical significance of social protest in Chile in a wider context of political reckoning in numerous countries around the world.

What we find to be distinctive to the Chilean context is the emphasis on the physical space of walls and surfaces. As with other global protest movements, digital media enabled a degree of communication and artistic production that is unparalleled in modern history. Chilean artists and designers drew on digital processes to fashion sophisticated and reproducible protest graphics, and social media provided a crucial tool for the dissemination of underground organizational directives and images of violence and revolt. Yet, despite the electronic aspects of the social revolution, the walls themselves—particularly the walls in the center of the city—retained a distinctive political and artistic relevance. They came to hold a unique power, a kind of aura that seemed to embody the will of the people. Our book accounts for this distinctiveness by showing
how the walls have been politically charged spaces since the 1970s, first under Salvador Allende and then throughout the Pinochet dictatorship. Using a semiotic approach to the Chilean social protest graphics, we trace out new configurations in aesthetics and politics, arguing that both the nation and its discursive formations are in a transformational moment. The demands of various grassroots collectives, which themselves are embedded in larger transnational, global struggles, indicate a profound reckoning with and reimagining of the idea of the nation-state itself. Equally significant, the social protests in Chile open a window onto the contemporary relationship between art and praxis, suggesting new avant-garde modes and modalities.

Wall graphics are by nature ephemeral. This book thus captures a pivotal moment in Chilean history. By mining the visual vocabulary of the walls, we seek to tell the story of that moment, exploring both its roots in Chilean history and the transcendental themes that emerged, including the ethics of violence, the mobilizing power of modern-day feminisms, indigenous demands to re-envision the state as plurinational, and the future of the avant-garde.

El Estallido Social

On the evening of Friday, 18 October 2019, scores of middle- and high-school students jumped the turnstiles of metro stations across the city in protest of a recent thirty peso fare hike. Throughout the week, students had staged demonstrations and launched scattered interventions across the metro system, chanting the slogan “Evadir, no pagar, otra forma de luchar” (perhaps best translated as “Jump the turnstile, don’t pay the fee, another way to fight the system”). Ever since a massive, student-led revolt against the privatization of education in 2011, periodic student protests against various aspects of the state’s economic project had become commonplace. Hence, actions against the fare hike were not unexpected. That Friday, President Sebastián Piñera had dispatched a beefed-up police presence to guard the metro, but it was quickly overrun by young teenagers armed with little more than their school backpacks. Images later circulated of youth vaulting turnstiles while heavily armed police stood by idly.

Yet, a series of events soon followed that clearly went beyond the accepted script of youthful protest. That same night, groups of hooded (encapuchado) youth ransacked and firebombed twenty subway stations, set fire to scores of public buses, and looted and burned multiple locations of the Walmart-owned supermarket chain, Lider. Also set ablaze was the multistory, corporate headquarters of Enel Américas, a multinational energy company that serves electricity markets across South America. Just after midnight, President Piñera declared a state of emergency and placed the head of the army, General Javier Iturriaga, in charge of public order. Walking the streets of Santiago on Saturday morning, one felt a palpable sense of uncertainty about what had happened and what might yet transpire. For the first time since 2010, when a massive earthquake paralyzed the country and led to episodes of looting, the military was sent into the streets to safeguard public infrastructure and defend the sovereignty of a state seemingly under attack. An article in El Mercurio, Chile’s leading conservative newspaper, noted that the “massive evasions [of the subway fare] had detonated a scenario without precedent.”

In an address to the nation Sunday night, President Piñera vowed to capture the “vandals” and “delinquents” behind the violence. “We are at war with a powerful, implacable enemy that has no respect for anything or anybody,” Piñera declared, undoubtedly believing the country’s order-minded citizenry would rally to his defense. However, the omnipresence of the military coupled with a curfew—initially for Santiago but extended elsewhere as various cities similarly experienced acts of sabotage—produced the opposite effect. Come Monday, the “ta-ta, ta-ta-ta” sound of spoons banging on pots—an established protest response known as a cacerolazo (from cacerola or cooking pot)—and the rhythmic honking of horns had blossomed into a universally understood soundtrack of a generalized dissent.
People from all walks of life, but especially of the working and middle classes, took to the streets, clamoring for dignity. As one handmade sign stated: “We are not of the left, nor of the right, we are those from below! And we’re coming for those from above!!!” A small rotunda of green space in the heart of the city, Plaza Italia, which features a monumental statue of General Manuel Baquedano (an instrumental force in the nineteenth-century subjugation of the Mapuche and a military hero during Chile’s War of the Pacific), emerged as the movement’s “Ground Zero” (figure 0.1).

This was not by accident. Since the 1960s, the Plaza Italia (also referred to as Plaza Baquedano) and a central boulevard, Avenida Libertador General Bernardo O’Higgins (commonly known as La Alameda), that traverses the rotunda have served as a meeting grounds for public demonstrations and a reference point for the socioeconomic divide between the wealthier districts to the northeast (barrio alto) and the working-class areas to the south. In his discussion of the centrality of the site during the 1970s, historian Camilo Trumper observes, “It is difficult to overstate the symbolic place the plaza occupied in the city’s social and political landscape.”

While Plaza Italia—a zone that was “liberated” by demonstrators and soon after rebaptized “Plaza de la Dignidad” or “Plaza Dignidad”—marked the protest’s epicenter, evidence of support for the movement extended into wealthier areas of the city as well. Hanging from an apartment window at the border between the comfortable, middle-class neighborhood of Providencia and the still wealthier area of Las Condes, a handmade banner summed up a sentiment in ample supply across the walls of the city: Chile Despertó (Chile has woken up) (figure 0.2). What began as a protest against a minor subway fare hike had quickly transformed into a major social uprising.

President Piñera tried to defuse the protests by revoking the fare hike, but it was too little too late. The following Tuesday he publicly accepted responsibility for the discontent, stating in a tweet, “We weren’t capable of recognizing this situation in its full magnitude.” And in an implicit acknowledgement of deeper discontent with the neoliberal model itself, Piñera noted that the social demands raised by the protesters reflected “an accumulation decades in the making.” He announced a series of reforms aimed at addressing concerns over pensions, health care, congressional salaries, and minimum wage, as well as a proposal to redistribute municipal funds more equitably across different parts of the city. But the demonstrations continued, each day building in size and intensity. On Friday, 25 October, the one-week anniversary of the start of the uprising, 1.2 million people took to the streets of central Santiago in the largest single protest march ever in the nation’s history. Simultaneously across the nation, from the northern region of Arica to the southern area of Magallanes, unprecedented numbers of peaceful demonstrators similarly made their voices heard.
The metaphor of “waking up” was widely invoked in the protests. Here, a simple poster with the text “Chile Woke Up” located along Avenida Providencia is figuratively endorsed by the incorporation of a heart. © Eric Zolov.

Figure 0.2.
heard. The next day, Piñera tweeted: “We have all heard the message. We have all changed.” He proclaimed an end to the week-long curfew and ordered the return of the military to their barracks. Henceforth, the Fuerzas Especiales, a highly militarized subunit of the Carabineros de Chile (Chile’s national police force or carabineros) and local police units would be responsible for public order. That Monday, Piñera reshuffled his cabinet and committed himself to “a new political and social dialogue.” Jettisoned was his much-maligned Interior Minister, Andrés Chadwick, a figure subsequently indicted for human rights abuses carried out under his watch and whose direct lineage to the Pinochet regime made him a central target of protesters.

Despite these concessions, large sections of the city’s center radiating outward from Plaza Italia remained in the hands of mostly youthful protesters. On 6 November, a wave of destruction rattled parts of the wealthier districts of Providencia and Las Condes. Hooded youth tore down street signs, destroyed bus stations, shattered the windows of banks and other multinational targets (such as McDonald’s), and unleashed a general sense of mayhem. The next day, the mayor of Providencia, Evelyn Matthei, tweeted, “We are living through a level of violence and destruction never before seen in the comuna.” Other neighborhoods also faced sustained acts of physical destruction, including the bohemian enclave Lastarria. On 13 November, the Vera Cruz Church (Iglesia de la Vera Cruz), a national monument in the center of the Lastarria area, was torched and ransacked. Desperate to halt the protests and contain the violence, the government announced an even more significant concession the following day: an agreement among the political parties to hold a spring referendum to determine whether a new constitution should be drafted. The morning after, on 15 November, an anonymous group of activists draped the entirety of the renamed Plaza Dignidad in long, white sheets, à la Bulgarian-born landscape artist, Christo. A single word hung vertically from a large banner descending from the top of the statue of General Baquedano: “PAZ” (PEACE) (figure 0.3). For

**Figure 0.3.** In the early morning of 15 November 2019, a day after President Piñera unexpectedly agreed to hold a plebiscite to vote on rewriting the constitution, Plaza Dignidad appeared draped in white with the word “PAZ” (PEACE) hanging from the statue of General Baquedano. The effect was short-lived, as police ordered the art-activists to remove the installation. Photo via Twitter @RadioPortales.
a brief interlude, it appeared that the massive disruption catalyzed by a thirty-peso hike to the price of a subway ride would finally subside.

Yet this was a movement without leadership or party affinity. It lacked interlocutors who might speak on its behalf, and many protesters were mistrustful of the political process itself. Despite the fact that a new constitution was a central demand of the protesters, many now expressed cynicism about the proposed plebiscite, doubting that the “true voice” of the people would be heard. More than two months after the start of the uprising, a large swath of Santiago’s commercial center remained shuttered. Many businesses erected welded steel barriers to ward against further destruction. Meanwhile, almost every available inch of wall space was covered in protest signage. Desperate to reclaim the streets, the carabineros maintained an indiscriminatory assault on protesters that left increasing numbers seriously and even mortally wounded. By then, the press began to focus on the alarming number of individuals (including bystanders) blinded by perdigones (rubber pellets and buckshot) wantonly fired by riot police. While the government denounced attacks on property and the persistence of disorder, human rights organizations issued a series of scathing reports which highlighted the lack of accountability of state agents and widespread, systematic rights violations. And although the scale of the protests never again reached the peak of the 25 October march, it was nevertheless evident to all that the streets—and the walls—belonged to the demonstrators.

El Estallido Artístico

The social explosion was at the same time an artistic explosion. The word estallido, which means literally “outbreak,” “explosion,” or “eruption,” captures the spontaneous energy that carried people out into the streets. Because of the pulsing movement of the marches and demonstrations, the city itself seemed to be bursting at the seams. Artists and activists consistently described the process of creating graffiti as an immediate and instinctive one; some tagged the walls directly while others harnessed feelings of rage and frustration to create more deliberate and elaborate artworks. The term artivismo (artivism) gained currency to describe the politically engaged artistic movement that defined the uprising. Street artists made use of a wide variety of techniques, from classic genres of illustration, photography, and muralism to reproducible media such as silk screen, stencil, risograph printing, and “paste-ups,” a technique by which large-scale compositions are pasted to the wall with wheat paste or a similar adherent.

Within a matter of weeks, Santiago’s city center had been transformed into an open-air museum. The walls of “Ground Zero”—an area that stretched for several blocks, emanating outward from Plaza Dignidad—were so covered in protest graphics that they seemed to invite visitors to browse (figure 0.4). Indeed, as prevalent as the street art itself were the pedestrians viewing and taking pictures of it. In the words of Chilean political playwright Guillermo Calderón, “The cultural impact of the crisis has converted the center into an art gallery.” Yet, unlike the typical museum, this was a popular art gallery, one produced by the people and for the people. For visual artist Paloma Rodríguez, the city provided a “showcase,” serving as a “museum of the people.” She said in an interview, “I find it amazing how the artistic movement—the artivismo—has overtaken the streets, and how these provisional walls put onto small businesses, large buildings, and institutions, among others, have turned public space into a veritable museum of people’s revolt” (figure 0.5). The Museo de la Dignidad, which is discussed at greater length in chapter 7, has attempted to preserve the legacy of this “museum of people’s revolt” by framing selected works from the uprising on the walls themselves.
Figure 0.4. A wall in Balmaceda Park, near Plaza Dignidad, reveals the proliferation of posters and the thematic content that typified downtown Santiago during the uprising. © Eric Zolov.
Figure 0.5. This graphic of a working-class woman confronting an armed policeman with a wooden spoon, child in hand, captures the idea of the “museum of people’s revolt.” This small glimpse of the exterior wall of the GAM, a location that assumed a unique role as an artistic canvas, meeting ground, and place of refuge for protesters, reveals the wide technical and aesthetic range of protest graphics and the layered nature of the walls themselves. © Eric Zolov.
Indeed, for many suspicious of official media, the walls became a primary source for news, commentary, and policy proposals. In an interview, street artist Miguel Ángel Kastro (“Kastro”) contrasted the “real news” from the street with the official press, claiming that the streets were transformed into “veritable newspapers.” “It’s enough to compare the information that the street offers us with the information that comes from the official press to understand that there is a huge divide.” In the tradition of Quebrantahuesos (Ospreys), Dadaist broadcast sheets of the 1950s, the messages on the walls provided a subversive source of communication. “In terms of the graphics, this an amazing moment,” said Cristian Norambuena, a member of the Colectivo de Serigrafía Instantánea (Rapid Silk Screen Collective), in an interview. “The uprising has shown that popular communication continues to be effective and remains the main vehicle by which we may overcome the barriers imposed by the media that censors our work.” In a reflection of how the mainstream media themselves came to recognize the aesthetic power of the protest graphics, various articles focused specifically on the posters, graffiti, and visual aspects of the movement. In that respect, the media helped propel particular images and artists to iconic status.

Not only did the graphics play a journalistic role in disseminating information, but they also conveyed the main demands of the social revolution. In this leaderless, grassroots revolution, the walls assumed an outsized political role. For Kastro, the graphics provide a key interpretative tool for understanding the phenomenon of the social revolution. “We can’t understand the massive scope of the marches without studying the placards and posters that rallied people to participate in them,” he said. “We can’t understand the importance of icons, for example, the Negro Matapacos (“Black Cop-Killer Dog”), without studying the hundreds of pages and profiles on Instagram collecting graphic material from the world of the protests.” Architect Sebastián Cuevas Vergara frames the phenomenon of the protest graphics in explicitly political terms, as a democratic, participatory process in which political platforms are articulated through the use of public space. “The agenda of the streets, the public’s agenda, is written on the city’s walls, and on Instagram . . . ,” he said in an interview. “I believe that the ideas that appear in the graffiti of Chile’s streets should be considered in the writing of the constitution. Values are created in the streets, and graffiti is a participatory process that reflects these values. One of the most important values that came out of these protests is dignity.”

Global Uprisings

The Chilean social uprising took place during a moment of global social reckoning. That same fall of 2019 (springtime in the southern hemisphere), massive social protests erupted across the world, from South America to the Middle East to Southeast Asia to Europe. As Samuel Brannen pointed out in a November 2019 article entitled “The Age of Leaderless Revolution,” the world was experiencing a “global political awakening.” “At this very moment,” Brannen wrote, “protesters are out on the streets of not only Lebanon, Iraq, and Chile but also Hong Kong, Spain, Bolivia, Ecuador, Honduras, Haiti, Egypt, and Algeria. They have been out in force as well in recent months in Russia, France, Indonesia, and Thailand.” Oceanic metaphors appeared to be an apt means to capture the overwhelming force of the movements. The year 2019 was called the “tsunami of protests” and the global protest movements “a tidal wave washing over our planet.” Interestingly, Hong Kong protesters employed an aquatic metaphor drawn from the martial arts realm, “Be water,” to encourage fluidity and evasiveness, a motto that found its counterpart in “evade” in Chile. According to Harvard political scientist Erica Chenoweth, the swelling force of these movements marked a new stage in “people power”: “People in more countries are using people power than any time in recorded history,” said Chenoweth in a New Yorker article. “Nonviolent mass movements are the primary challenges to governments today. This represents a pronounced shift in the global landscape of dissent.”
These grassroots movements or “popular insurgencies” shared a number of defining features: a lack of visible leadership or party orientation; largely non-violent, civil resistance; and creative, rebellious youthful energy. While the specific platforms differed, protest movements held a number of common causes, such as economic inequality, mistrust of political establishments, rejection of government corruption, feminist challenges to patriarchal systems, and climate concerns. Numerous movements brought about governmental reforms and changes. Following extensive “Yellow Vest” protests, for instance, French President Emmanuel Macron introduced a number of tax reforms, including the withdrawal of the gas tax that had fueled the fires of protesters. Lebanon’s “October Revolution” led to extensive political and economic reforms, including the elimination of a number of state bodies. Hong Kong withdrew its controversial extradition bill that would allow residents to be sent to mainland China for trial (but the more recent post-pandemic crackdown and May 2020 national security law has blown a hole in this victory). Numerous political leaders were forced to resign, including Iraq’s Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi and Algeria’s President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who had been in office for twenty years.

Central to all of these global movements was the role of digital media. Digital platforms enabled artists and designers to produce cutting-edge protest graphics, drawings, and memes that were infinitely reproducible. By communicating through social networks, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram, protesters were able to organize large groups of people at the touch of a button. They were also able to document events and preserve social movement artifacts in a historically unprecedented way. Hong Kong, in particular, was a hub of digital protest graphics. Drawing on traditions of Japanese anime, superheroes, and Hollywood film, Hong Kong designers realized ideas produced in collective chat sessions and shared them on encrypted messaging apps, such as Telegram and AirDrop. Social media also enabled protesters from one nation to pick up strategies from others, a phenomenon that David Gordon of the International Institute for Strategic Studies has called “global contagion.” For example, when Barcelona protesters headed to the airport to protest the imprisonment of Catalan separatists, they shouted, “We’re going to do a Hong Kong.” Hong Kong’s “Umbrella Movement” inspired the use of umbrellas as shields against tear gas and rubber bullets across the globe. France’s “yellow vest,” which is derived from the emergency attire motorists are required to carry, has become a general global protest sign. Marvel comic figures such as the Joker became popular protest symbols in movements around the world (as is discussed further in chapter 8).

Historiographical Overview

The exceptional drama of Chilean history since the early 1970s has inspired a vast number of writings in both Spanish and English focusing on different aspects of the nation’s social, cultural, and political trajectory. Salvador Allende’s attempt to bring about a “peaceful road to socialism,” one marked by constitutionalist rule yet with direct inspiration and collaboration from Communist Cuba, set Chile apart from other countries in Latin America. Recent works by Patrick Barr-Melej and Alfonso Salgado have focused on the cultural politics of this era (often referred to as the Global Sixties), a period marked by creativity in the arts and transformations in political subjectivities. At the same time, other writings have begun to examine the intense factionalism within Allende’s left-wing coalition. Tanya Harmer’s recent biography of Beatriz Allende (Salvador Allende’s politically engaged daughter) provides an especially lively entry point into this factious and ultimately tragic history. Harmer’s earlier book, Allende’s Chile and the Inter-American Cold War, opened up new pathways for interpreting how a shifting Cold War context—one marked by US-Soviet détente, on one hand, and the rise of Latin American militarism, on the other—ultimately defined Allende’s options, nationally and geopolitically. The US-backed overthrow of Allende in 1973 and the implement-
tation of a brutal dictatorship under the regime of Augusto Pinochet likewise has generated an expansive literature. This has focused on various aspects of the dictatorship, including the role of the United States, mechanisms of state terrorism, forms of resistance and grassroots activism, and the experiences of exile. Initiated in part by Steve Stern’s monumental trilogy, *The Memory Box of Pinochet’s Chile* (2004–2010), authors from a variety of academic disciplines have more recently focused their attention on the question of memory and the ways in which the socio-political legacies of the Pinochet era continue to characterize the body politic nearly five decades after the coup of 1973.

Under Pinochet, Chile experienced the impact of neoliberal reforms more than a decade before the rest of Latin America, a process that simultaneously laid the basis for rapid macro-economic growth yet also widespread income inequality. A wealth of writings examine the multitudinous forms of social mobilization against these structural reforms, both during the dictatorship and in the decades following the return to democracy. In particular, these works have focused on factory and mine workers, feminism, and indigenous rights movements. Moreover, similar to the impact of the 1994 Zapatista movement in Mexico, Chile’s 2006 and 2011–13 student-led movements in support of fundamental educational reform led to a profound reexamination of the successes and failures of the “Chilean model.”

Chile also has a rich history of political graphics, one reflected especially in poster art and muralism. In English, Camilo Trumper’s landmark book, *Ephemeral Histories: Public Art, Politics, and the Struggle for the Streets in Chile* (2016), established the public sphere as a site of historical record and interpretation. More recently, Guisela Latorre’s *Democracy on the Wall: Street Art of the Post-Dictatorship Era in Chile* (2019) looks at the role of graffiti artists and the ways in which the walls continue to serve as “an alternative means of public communication” into the post-Pinochet period. While these works focus mainly on wall art and graffiti, two invaluable Spanish-language collections, *Un grito en la pared: Psicodelia, compromiso político y exilio en el cartel chileno* (2009) and *El afiche político en Chile: 1970–2013* (2013), provide historical narrative and insight into the significance of poster art in Chile from the mid 1960s to the 2011 protests. Our book is deeply indebted to these social, political, and cultural histories.

Finally, the *estallido* itself has already produced a rapidly expanding body of literature, many available only as e-books. The majority of these works focus on the historical origins and the social and political aspects of the revolt. Others are oriented toward the dramatic street images generated by the protest movement. A subset of this literature includes memoir and fiction, thus pointing to the ways in which the *estallido* has had a paradigmatic impact on social and cultural norms. Furthermore, a growing body of works explores the implications of a representative constitutional assembly now tasked with writing a new Chilean constitution, arguably the most consequential victory of the uprising.

Rather than focusing on one particular artistic medium, our work approaches the subject of political graphics during the 2019–20 social revolution from an integrative perspective, one that examines graffiti, posters, stencil art, wall murals, and the more recent approach known as “paste-up.” We read these graphics from an aesthetic angle yet simultaneously use them as primary documents to interpret the sociopolitical demands and characteristics of the protest movement itself. During the course of the uprising, we took more than three thousand color photographs of graphics located primarily in the neighborhoods of Lastarria, Bellavista, and Bellas Artes of the city center as well as the adjacent *comunas* of Providencia and Nuñoa. Significantly, these latter locations are all considered wealthier districts that, historically speaking, have not been centers of protest street culture. In stark contrast to other working-class (*popular*) sectors of the city, where political graffiti and other expressions of street art are common, the walls of these residential and commercial areas are normally clean. In that respect, this book focuses on a very different urban “center” than discussions of street art have typically examined. The fact that these middle- and upper-class districts became directly implicated as zones of contestation, their walls dramatically transformed into canvases for protest graphics, points to what should be understood as a new configuration in the geographies of power. In recent years,
Chilean street art had acquired a level of global recognition that helped propel certain areas of the country, notably Valparaíso, into popular tourist destinations. The appropriation of walls in the heart of Santiago’s commercial and residential districts thus indicated an unprecedented leveraging of the inherent power of those spaces to circumvent the political process and bring long-standing demands for economic and social reform directly to the attention of the nation—and the world. Indeed, one of the more significant aspects of the estallido artístico is the fact that the wall graphics themselves became part of the international news story about Chile. Moreover, numerous examples of the street art quickly found their way into commodified forms, ranging from coffee mugs and posters to T-shirts and key chains. Sometimes, reproductions of graphics were made by the illustrators themselves, some of whom were artists by profession. In short, the location of the walls mattered as did, in certain cases, the background of the artists as well.

The approximately 150 photographs in this book are not meant to be comprehensive, but emblematic. Unless otherwise indicated, all of the photographs in the book are originals. All translations of the graphics, interviews, and other source materials are also our own unless otherwise indicated. Our discussion and analysis, moreover, draws upon personal interviews with visual and graphic artists, members of different artistic and feminist collectives, and performance artists, as well as newspapers, periodicals, social media, archival material, and secondary literature. It is our aim throughout this work to let the voices of Chilean artists and activists come through. Each chapter is organized around a central theme of the 2019–20 social uprising and takes as its title the key protest slogan or trope associated with that theme. While we read the social revolution through the lens of the protest graphics, we anchor our analyses in a larger historical frame, tracing the predominant images of the social revolution back to their social, political and historical roots.

Overview

Part I of the book, “Memory Boxes,” anchors the social uprising in its longer socio-political history. The first chapter, “It’s Not 30 Pesos, It’s 30 Years,” explores the roots of the contemporary crisis by locating protests against neoliberalism in the socio-economic legacy of the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet. For many, the return of the military to the streets and nightly curfews were reminiscent of the days of the civic-military dictatorship, opening what historian Steve J. Stern has called a “memory box.” The mobilization of memory was reflected in the metaphors equating the two regimes, such as “Piñera=Pinochet” and “2019=1973.” The presence of wall graphics such as “Death to Neoliberalism!” and “Ciao Chicago Boys!” reflected protests against neoliberal policies that date from the Pinochet regime and are enshrined in the 1980 Constitution. Moreover, this critique of neoliberalism is both economic and political in that many activists maintain that memory itself has been subject to the power of the market. Reflective of this critique, various collectives have been fighting for decades to recuperate former sites of torture that are privately owned. The second chapter, “The Right to Live in Peace,” examines why Víctor Jara, the Allende-era folk protest singer brutally killed in the opening days of the dictatorship, reemerged as a unifying protest referent and how his 1971 recording, “El Derecho de Vivir en Paz” (The Right to Live in Peace), originally written as a protest song against the U.S. war in Vietnam, became a resistance anthem. The chapter further explores the ways in which the 2019–20 estallido invoked various protest symbols and texts from the Allende period. In key respects, contemporary protest graphics reveal how the contested political strategies of protest (peaceful versus more militant forms) and the use of aesthetic languages in circulation during the Global Sixties have carried over into the present.

Part II of the book, “Revolutionary Currents,” looks at the highly visible social movements of anarchy, feminism, and indigenous rights. Chapter 3, “Evade!,” explores the ways in which the word evade (to evade/dodge) encapsulated an ethos of resistance, yet morphed into various forms, both semantically and tactically.
One of these directions moved toward a broader, anarchist, and punk-influence strand of protest, one that manifested itself in physical destruction, iconoclastic ruptures, and violent confrontation with agents of the state. In chapter 4, “The Revolution Will Be Feminist or Will Not Be!,” we focus on the revolutionary feminist ethos and rhetoric that constituted a major motif of the protest graphics. This rhetoric brings together the present and past in its call for the recognition of, and end to, sexual and political violence rooted in the abuses of the Pinochet regime. Here we take into account feminist interventions in the political landscape, such as site-specific performances, marches, and demonstrations as well as the use of nudity as a central device for the reclamation of the female body. Chapter 5, “Wallmapu Librel,” delves into the deeper history of indigenous resistance to state violence and more recent mobilizations in support of Mapuche political, territorial, and cultural claims. From the start of the uprising, demonstrators carried the Wenüfoye, the flag of the Mapuche indigenous communities, often waved alongside the Chilean national flag. The protests also overlapped with the one-year anniversary commemorating the state killing of Mapuche leader Camilo Marcelo Catrillanca, one of a long line of what many view as political assassinations of indigenous activists. Solidarity with the Mapuche was driven by a profound identification with indigenous demands for restitution of historical injustices. At the same time, a radical, indigenous-centered critique of Chile's neoliberal state and of a constitution that fails to account for the nation's aboriginal population reinforced a broader attack on the state by the majority of protesters. Chapter 6, “Chile Woke Up,” focuses on the theme of the eye, one that assumed growing importance over the course of the social revolution. Due to excessive violence on the part of the police, the social protests witnessed an unparalleled number of ocular injuries, including partial and complete blindness. Wounded and missing eyes came to dominate the protest graphics campaigns, appearing in graffiti and statues, arpilleras (embroidered tapestries), mosaics and street interventions, making a stark critique of police brutality and suggesting that Chileans could still “see.”

In Part III, “Aesthetics and Politics,” we look at the relationship between art and political forms and realities, examining the avant-garde aspects of the movement and the various ways in which Chileans drew on artistic devices to confront violence and injustice. Chapter 7, “Poetry Is in the Street,” directly considers the relationship between aesthetics and politics. We regard the Chilean protest movement as a contemporary avant-garde movement, or a movement in the vanguard, in that novel aesthetic strategies and collective formations were at the heart of the socio-political struggle. This chapter explores the ways in which many of the wall graphics employed in the Chilean protest movement drew on the historical avant-garde, in particular the movements of futurism, expressionism, Dada, and surrealism, and it considers the new avant-garde modalities that have emerged from Chilean interventions in the political landscape. In our reading in this chapter and the book as a whole, we consider every form of expression used in the social protest as a kind of “public art,” an art form which takes meaning from its context and expresses popular sentiments. Chapter 8, “It’s a Match!,” explores the pop sensibility, humor, and spirit of irreverence that informed many of the wall graphics. In particular, we profile three artists who contributed works that quickly took on iconic status within the social protest movement: Paloma Rodríguez, Claudio Caiozzi (better known as “Caiozzama”), and Fabian (“Fab”) Ciraolo. Each artist produced graphic images that draw upon popular culture references, both from Hollywood cinema and social media. Moreover, each used the technique of paste-up to render graphic representations that convey a life-like, three-dimensionality to their subjects. Finally, chapter 9, “Behind the Scenes,” examines the social and cultural history of print-making collectives that form the foundation upon which the artistic explosion built. Through interviews with various members of four important collectives (Taller Libre, Colectivo de Serigrafía Instantánea, Brigada de Propaganda Feminista, and Taller de Gráfica Inmediata), we take a look behind the scenes at the political and cultural discourse, as well as individuals responsible for the production and dissemination of protest graphics. While certain artistic actors maintain deeper roots in Chile’s social history, others emerged in the direct context of the 2019–20 events.
In the Conclusion, we take stock of the crisis of the nation-state in the contemporary era. This chapter brings events into the present moment, noting the ways in which President Piñera took advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic to reclaim the streets of Santiago, a phenomenon echoed in countries across the globe. While most of the global protest movements were forced to go underground (or into the ether), the Black Lives Matter movement surged in the United States and drew massive amounts of support both domestically and abroad, suggesting a continued wave of grassroots protests. We close with reflections on the continued relevance of walls in a virtual world, the testimonial role that protest graphics play, and the future outlook for revolutionary movements in Chile and worldwide. A brief epilogue is written from the post-plebiscite perspective, as Chileans convened to write a new constitution, a transformation directly made possible by the estallido and reflective of the multiple demands rendered visible on the walls of the nation and the diversity of revolutionary currents that have clamored for a new Chile.

Notes

1. For a detailed discussion of the timeline, see Mario Garcés, *Estallido social y una Nueva Constitución para Chile* (Santiago: LOM, 2020), chap. 1. Middle- and high-school students had been protesting in the downtown areas of the city since at least 2018.
5. We will be using the denomination “Plaza Dignidad” throughout the book as this is now the commonly accepted term.
8. Tweet quoted in Valentina González y Maritza Tapia, “Más de un millón doscientas mil personas se sumaron a la marcha más masiva del país,” *El Mercurio*, 26 October 2019, C1. Prior to this point, the largest demonstration had been the 8 March 2019 Women’s Day March (190,000 people); the largest of the 2011–13 student movement marches drew between 60,000 and 100,000 people.
12. Sebastián Vedoya M., “Destrozos y saqueos en Providencia y Las Condes marcan jornada en Santiago,” *La Tercera*, 7 November 2019, 2. Mattei is the daughter of Fernando Mattei, an Air Force general who served the military junta throughout the dictatorship. A previous mayor of the district, Cristián Labbé (1996–2012) was a former member of the DINA (secret police under Pinochet) and an army officer; he was recently prosecuted for human rights

13. P. Valles and P. Bahamondes, “Incendio en la Iglesia de la Veracruz,” La Tercera, 14 November 2019, 26. Defacement of church properties was common in recent years in response to sex and corruption scandals. Throughout the estallido many churches were covered in graffiti, and their windows were shattered.

14. The plebiscite was originally scheduled for April 2020 but was postponed to 25 October 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All parties except for the Communist Party consented. The plebiscite would propose two questions: (1) Should a constitutional convention be held? (2) If so, what form should this convention take? It would be either a Constitutional Assembly composed of fully elected delegates or a Constitutional Convention made up of 50 percent delegates chosen from Congress. The Communist Party denounced the ruling parties (Unión Democrática Independiente [UDI] and Renovación Nacional [RN]) for failing to invite them to the meeting to discuss the proposal.


17. Quoted in Natalia Rizzo, “Las calles de Chile como museo de la revuelta: el arte de Paloma Rodríguez,” La Izquierda Diario, 17 February 2020. Retrieved 29 January 2021 from http://www.laizquierdadiario.com/Las-calles-de-Chile-como-museo-de-la-revuelta-el-arte-de-Paloma-Rodriguez. In this respect, the city center became a counterpart to the widely celebrated Museo a Cielo ABIERTO in the western, working-class district of San Miguel that opened in 2010. See Guisela Latorre, Democracy on the Wall: Street Art of the Post-Dictatorship Era in Chile (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2019), chap. 2.


19. As Rulo, one of the members of the Museo de la Dignidad, explains, “‘The golden frame has provided street art pieces, which are essentially ephemeral, a sense of protection to help them survive censorship or hatefulness.’” Quoted in Gabriela Mesones Rojo, “Chile’s Protest Street Art: The Writing Is on the Wall,” BBC News, 1 March 2020. Retrieved 29 January 2021 from https://www.bbc.com/news/51628295.

20. In an interview, a member of the Brigada de Propaganda Feminista said, “[O]n the walls is what is not said in the press. This is also a country where the mass media have been taken over by the groups in power.” Interview by Cristián Aravena and Abigail Dávalos with members of the Colectivo de Serigrafía Instantánea and the Brigada de Propaganda Feminista, the first of a series of conversations, “Arte y Protesta: Diálogos a partir de la exposición de gráfica callejera Chile Despertó,” based on an exhibition of Chilean protest graphics in Mexico City, 30 April 2020. Retrieved 29 January 2021 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vxBppwNjuj0.


22. Interview by Eric Zolow with Cristian Norambuena, Colectivo de Serigrafía Instantánea, Santiago, Chile, 11 December 2019. At times, this group is also referred to as the Taller de Serigrafía Instantánea but throughout our book we will use the preferred term, “Colectivo” (collective).

23. See, for example, “Lo que dicen nuestros muros,” Viernes: La Revista de La Segunda, 8 December 2019, 12–15.


33. “Do Today’s Global Protests Have Anything in Common?”


35. According to David Gordon, “There may be a global contagion due to social media. Seeing protests in other places motivates people to be willing to go to the streets in their own countries.” Quoted in Wright, “The Story of 2019.” See also An Xiao Mina, Memes to Movements: How the World’s Most Viral Media is Changing Social Protest and Power (Boston: Beacon Press, 2019).


40. Tanya Harmer, Beatriz Allende: A Revolutionary Life in Cold War Latin America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020). The subject of the MIR has become the focus of recent work. See Marian E. Schlotterbeck, Beyond the Vanguard: Everyday Revolutionaries in Allende’s Chile (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018).

41. Tanya Harmer, Allende’s Chile and the Inter-American Cold War (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2014). See also the collection, Tanya Harmer and Alfredo Riquelme, eds., Chile y la Guerra Fría global (Santiago: RIL, 2014).


47. Latorre, Democracy on the Wall, 3. Her work builds on Rod Palmer’s earlier investigations into Chilean street art, Street Art Chile (London: Eight Books Limited, 2008).


50. See, for instance, Palmer, Street Art Chile; Latorre, Democracy on the Wall.

51. In 2003, Valparaíso was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in part because of its distinctive wall murals.
