

Portable Borders/Mythical Sites: Performance Art and
Politics on the US *Frontera*, 1968-Present

by

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B.A., Williams College (2005)

Submitted to the Department of Architecture,
School of Architecture and Planning,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

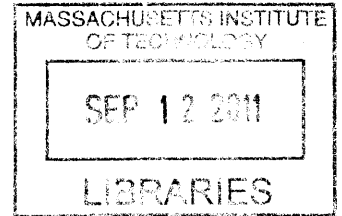
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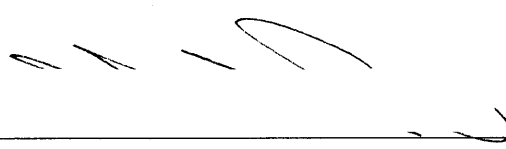
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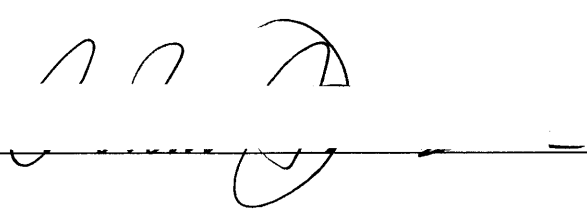
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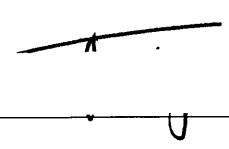
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Abstract

Artists working on the U.S. side of the U.S.-Mexican border have, since the 1970s Chicano movement, actively explored this charged site in generating socially conscious art projects. This border art, formerly seen as “marginal,” is explored in this dissertation as central to an interrogation of site-specificity and globalization – particularly in the medium of performance art. Based on an analysis of artworks from four decades by artists such as David Avalos and the Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Coco Fusco, Felipe Ehrenberg, and the collaborative team of Allora and Calzadilla, the dissertation claims that border artists both anticipated and responded to larger economic and social shifts, particularly the trade relations heralded by NAFTA in 1994. Site-specificity and performance became complex and sometimes contradictory tools that these artists used to make statements on the nature of economic and political relations between North and South, rich and poor, American and Mexican, citizen and immigrant. Art, rather than pure political action, is particularly equipped to encourage such exploration, as the indeterminacy of art (rather than the determinacy of political action) allows for the processes of social change. This line of inquiry can be extended to other border and transnational regions. Rethinking art and art history from its “borders” – literal and metaphorical – ultimately destabilizes traditional art historiographic narratives in a productive way.

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Chapter 1

The Border Problematic



Figure 1-1: Javier Téllez, *One Flew Over the Void* (2005). Image from the InSite archive, San Diego, CA.

Javier Téllez' 2005 performance *One Flew Over the Void* shot a stuntman from a cannon over the U.S.-Mexico border. The piece drew on earlier performances that emphasized the physicality of the borderline while benefiting from the dematerialization and conceptualization of the border that had taken place in recent years. This iconic image shows a human cannonball in mid-air directly over the steel fence separating the United States from Mexico. The cannon is in Mexico, on Tijuana Beach, while the net is in San Diego's

Border Field State Park. The stuntman flies from one country to the other, from Mexico to the United States. This cannonball flight now holds the Guinness Record for “fastest international border crossing.” A single figure (U.S. stuntman David Smith) occupies the upper half of the photo, while in the lower portion, a crowd is gathered and decorations adorn the Mexican side of the fence. This performance was the most prominent of the 2005 version of InSite, the “somewhat triennial” binational arts festival on the U.S.-Mexico border. In essence, Javier Téllez, a Venezuelan, commissioned a U.S. citizen to fly over the border, in a performance organized and attended by people from all over the United States and Mexico. As I will discuss more extensively in Chapter Five, InSite in general has been criticized for bringing internationally recognized outsider artists to the U.S.-Mexico border region, in essence privileging their ideas over those of border dwellers.

I term this conflict, the inability to resolve the issue of distance and perspective, the “border problematic.” Unlike others, however, this problematic is not one to be resolved, but is itself a means to understand the U.S.-Mexico border. The problematic is useful for negotiating the territory of borders and boundaries. One can construct the U.S.-Mexico border as a physical line, a state of mind, and an economic and labor issue, among others. In turn, this conceptualization helps us to comprehend how art has altered this landscape, as well as forced an examination of the nature of the term. In this way, Téllez, the Venezuelan, can offer his take on immigration from Mexico to the United States. It becomes irrelevant whether his status as an outsider limits his access to the debate, for the definition of the border itself has shifted so dramatically that it is impossible to determine who is in and who is out. The border problematic allows us to consider a number of different perspectives in relation to the border, including the outsider, the border dweller, the international immigrant or migrant worker, the Anglo, and the Mexican. Only through the lens of this problematic can we understand the border as a complex and constantly shifting phenomenon.

These shifts must be comprehended within a larger historical context. Geographical borders were once enforced through a series of highly codified visual cues. These pre-national boundaries relied heavily on the symbolic nature of the borderline. Demarcations

could be read with ease by those within its jurisdiction, and less so by outsiders. In this manner, the border served to divide those who belonged from those on the outside, rather than marking an edge between nation-states. With the dismantling of colonial powers after the Second World War and the subsequent emergence of subaltern and multicultural studies in the 1980s, the concept of “border” became unsettled once more. “Border” began to refer to a variety of non-physical boundaries: those between cultural or belief systems, those separating the colonial and the postcolonial, and even those demarcating various kinds of subjects.

In the course of this dissertation, I will argue that by the late 20th century, particularly in the world of visual art, borders came to represent a space of performance rather than a geographical boundary, a cultural terrain meant to be negotiated. This dematerialization of the physical border after the 1980s worked in two opposite directions – the movement of border thinking to the rest of the world, as well as the importation of ideas to the border itself. Walter D. Mignolo’s “border thinking” helps to explain this phenomenon:

To describe in “reality” both sides of the border is not the problem. The problem is to do it from its exteriority. . . . The goal is to erase the distinction between the knower and the known, between a ‘hybrid’ object (the borderland as the known) and a “pure” disciplinary or interdisciplinary subject (the knower), uncontaminated by the border matters he or she describes. To change the terms of the conversation it is necessary to overcome the distinction between subject and object. . . and between epistemology and hermeneutics. . . . Border thinking should be the space in which this new logic could be thought out.¹

As is evident from Mignolo’s definition, “border thinking” questions the essentialist perspective. This idea contradicts much of the rhetoric surrounding 1970s Chicano and 1980s U.S.-Mexico border art, and in doing so, opens up the border problematic. I will analyze Mignolo’s work in the context of U.S.-Mexico border art in the fourth chapter, but it helps for now to introduce the idea.

¹Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 18.

Mignolo is a theorist of the Modernity/Coloniality Research Program,² a school of thought that “locates its own inquiry in the very borders of systems of thought and reaches towards the possibility of non-eurocentric modes of thinking.”³ My dissertation owes much to the work of M/C theorists, such as Mignolo, Enrique Dussel and Aníbal Quijano. Mignolo’s work in particular allows us to break from a traditional center-periphery model, in which ideas are generated in the center and flow outward.⁴ When applied to the U.S.-Mexico situation, border thinking bypasses the model by which the region has been theorized. The complex intermingling of social and cultural norms provides a locus for specialized knowledge, one that does not rely on traditional Western narratives for legitimacy.

Although border thinking focuses on modes of cultural and knowledge production, that does not efface the reality of state-enforced boundaries. The characterization of these boundaries often depends on the geographic and cultural positioning of the author. The Euro-centric view, in light of the European Union’s increasing integration, has focused on terms like “porousness” and “vacillation” to describe the more nebulous situation being created in that zone.⁵ According to philosopher Etienne Balibar,

We are living in a conjuncture of the vacillation of borders, both of their layout and their function – that is at the same time a vacillation of the very notion of border, which has become particularly equivocal. This vacillation affects our very consciousness of a European “identity,” because Europe is the point of the world whence border lines set forth to be drawn throughout the world, because it is the native land of the very representation of the border as this sensible and supersensible “thing”...⁶

²Arturo Escobar traces the intellectual genealogy of the twenty-first century M/C Research program as “liberation theology from the 1960s and 1970s; debates in Latin American philosophy and social science around notions of liberation philosophy and autonomous social science (e.g. Enrique Dussel, Rodolfo Kusch, Orlando Fals Borda, Pablo Gonzales Casanova, Darcy Ribeiro); dependency theory; the debates on Latin American modernity and postmodernity in the 1980s, followed by discussions on hybridity in anthropology, communications and cultural studies in the 1990s; and, in the United States, the Latin American Subaltern Studies group.” While not an official department or course of study, major sites of M/C research include the universities in the Durham-Chapel Hill area and Berkeley in the United States, and Quito, Mexico City, and Bogotá in Latin America.

³Arturo Escobar “Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise,” *Cultural Studies* 21 (2007): 179-210.

⁴Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs* (2000), 18. The concept of border thinking will be expanded further in Chapter 4.

⁵Etienne Balibar, “The Borders of Europe,” *Cosmopolitics: thinking and feeling beyond the nation*, ed. Peng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 216.

⁶Ibid.

With this statement, Balibar underscores a key issue of European national identity in the age of porous borders; namely, how to define “nation” when the very enforcement of national boundaries is in flux.

Similar anxieties apply to the U.S.-Mexico border region, where a significant shift in ethnic demographics has stirred deep-seated resentments among Anglo-Americans, Mexican-Americans and recent Latin American immigrants. It is clear that early twenty-first century immigration legislation, such as Arizona’s controversial SB1070 bill (2010), was posed as a reaction to this creeping sense of unease. Proponents claimed that the very identity of the United States was at stake. Although the reactions of U.S. lawmakers varied considerably from those in Europe, a similar confusion of national and cultural identity is at stake.

This anxiety concerning the physical integration of disparate cultures stands in direct contrast to the twenty-first century view of globalization as a sea of endless possibilities and interactions. In 2000, journalist Pico Iyer chronicled the dissolution of national borders and the resulting displacement brought by globalization in his narrative *The Global Soul: Jet Lag, Shopping Malls, and the Search for Home*.⁷ Iyer’s strangely idealized vision of a global community centered itself on the freedom of travel and continuous border crossings. The definition of crossing in the postmodern, globalized version of society becomes destabilized. Border no longer refers solely to the line separating nation-states, but to the points of contact between different cultures. In particular, spaces of transit provide the greatest number of interactions.

We have here the essential border paradox: at the same time that borders are becoming more fluid, porous and metaphorical, there exists an imperative to strengthen them further, to reassert their presence. Even as the 1985 Schengen agreement erased obstacles to travel within Europe, the neutral people of Switzerland voted in 2009 to ban the construction of minarets. While technological advancements allow for constant communication anywhere in the world, governments such as those in China and Egypt effectively censor the Internet. Pico Iyer can wax poetic on the global traveler’s exquisite ennui, but the fact

⁷Pico Iyer, *The Global Soul: Jet Lag, Shopping Malls, and the Search for Home* (New York: Knopf, 2000).

remains that for billions of people in the world, international travel is an elusive proposition, for reasons both political and financial.

Artists working on the U.S.-Mexico border in the 1990s anticipated this twenty-first century situation. At the same time that performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña began to explore the portability of the border, artist and Chicano organizer David Avalos initiated a re-insistence on the primacy of site and a renewed focus on the region's political and social realities. The border began to stretch in different directions, becoming dematerialized and internalized, while in other works, more solid and external than ever before.

In light of these distinctions between contemporary border situations, it is daunting to speak of a single "border theory" or "border milieu."⁸ A more difficult task, even, is to decide on a definition of "border." According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word is a noun meaning "side, edge, brink, or margin; a limit, or boundary; the part of anything lying along its boundary or outline."⁹ Only in the second definition is there a mention of nation-states:

The boundary line which separates one country from another, the frontier line. on the border: on or close to this line, on either side; hence, in the border district... over the border: across the frontier line.¹⁰

This definition necessitates an interrogation of the term "frontier," or in Spanish, *frontera*. The connotations of the word reveal much about the place the border holds in the American imaginary. Photographer David Taylor of the University of New Mexico-Las Cruces has written about the differences between the Mexican idea of *frontera* and the American "frontier."

The literal meaning of the word "frontier" is identical in both English and Spanish. However, its vernacular usage in each language is strikingly different. In

⁸Anthropologist Oscar J. Martínez' term in his book *Border People: Life and Society in the US-Mexico Borderlands* (Tucson and London: University of Arizona Press, 1994).

⁹Oxford English Dictionary Online, accessed February 16, 2011, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/21617?rskey=Firo8Z&result=1&isAdvanced=false#>.

¹⁰Ibid.

the American psyche the frontier is an elusive destination; the locus of such national allegories as individuality, self-reliance, and freedom. It is “The-Great-Out-There-Just-Beyond-The-Horizon.” Conversely, “la frontera” adheres to literal definitions – it is the border or borderline; it is a barrier.¹¹

Even though this definition is localized to the U.S.-Mexico border, the tension between the frontier as a vast space of unlimited potential and the *frontera* as a barrier can describe the situation in any number of boundary regions around the world.

1.1 Historical Review

Continuing to interrogate the meaning of “border,” one must grapple with the definition of a boundary. Boundaries “signify the point at which something becomes something else, at which the way things are done changes, at which ‘we’ end and ‘they’ begin, at which certain rules for behavior no longer obtain and others take hold.”¹² According to anthropologists, boundaries can be divided into several categories. In theorist Roderick J. Lawrence’s formulation quoted above, there are four: physical (communication of a visual or auditory kind), symbolic (decorative/aesthetic value, expressing differences between domains), administrative (management and control of domains), and judicial (legal possession). Boundaries apply to purely social situations as well; one can speak of them as the territorial dimension of social interactions.¹³ This definition expands the idea of border far beyond the push/pull of frontier/frontera. Casting the U.S.-Mexico border (and other regions) in terms of boundaries still fails to encompass the full reality of these situations – and the power of the border as a metaphor as well as its unrelenting physicality.

¹¹“David Taylor’s Website,” accessed February 17, 2011, <http://www.dtaylorphoto.com/Portfolio.cfm?nk=7735&nL=1&nS=3#0>. Taylor’s work explores the inner workings of the U.S. Border Patrol from a photo-journalistic perspective. His 2011 book, *Working the Line*, is a collection of photographs of the 276 obelisk boundary markers, as well as his interactions with the Border Patrol.

¹²Roderick J. Lawrence, “The Multidimensional Nature of Boundaries: An Integrative Historical Perspective,” *Setting Boundaries: The Anthropology of Spatial and Social Organization*, ed. Deborah Fellow (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1996), 15.

¹³The concepts of “boundary” and its companion, “territoriality” have been widely studied in other disciplines, especially sociology and history. Territoriality, according to legal theorist Robert David Sack in a 1986 study, is “a spatial strategy to affect, influence, or control resources and people, by controlling area; and, as a strategy, territoriality can be turned on and off. . . a form of spatial behavior.” From Robert David Sack, *Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

Physical borders were defined in a number of ways before the development of cartography. Markers were placed at the peripheries of territory prior to maps becoming widely circulated authorities on the apportionment of land. In the case of the Roman *termini*, stones marked the extent of empire.¹⁴ These ancient methods of demarcating territory became codified in the Middle Ages. With the widespread use of fortifications, city and town walls defined not only the state, but also the military presence of the sovereign.¹⁵ These barriers provided an imposing visual presence at a time when the power of feudal lords was constantly shifting and land was under tenuous control at best.¹⁶ Fortification eventually moved beyond massive stoneworks and surface decoration to a complex system of aesthetics and geometries as identificatory gestures.¹⁷

By studying the case of art and politics on the border, it is possible to gain some insight into urban spatial and temporal situations elsewhere in the world. Other disciplines, such as urban planning and history, have benefitted from substantial scholarship into the nature of borders, boundaries and territory. The phenomenon of divided cities, such as Jerusalem, Nicosia, or Cold War-era Berlin, has posed an intriguing problem to urban theorists and architectural historians.¹⁸ Another manifestation of divided cities comes in

¹⁴See Catherine Delano Smith, "The Emergence of 'Maps' in European Rock Art: A Prehistoric Preoccupation with Place," *Imago Mundi* 34 (1982): 9-25, and John E. Stambaugh's book *The Ancient Roman City* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988). For more on the history of cartography, see Leo Bagrow's *History of Cartography*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966 (1951). For a thorough study of territoriality in the age of cartography, J. B. Harley considers the idea in his 2001 book *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography* (Paul Laxton, ed. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

¹⁵See David Bruce and Oliver Creighton. "Contested Identities: The Dissonant Heritage of European Town Walls and Walled Towns," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 12 (2006): 234-254. Also Daine Owen Hughes, "Urban Growth and Family Structure in Medieval Genoa," *Past and Present* 66 (1975): 3-28.

¹⁶The mere presence of walls, however, could only provide information as to the limits of territorial control, not the identity of the power in control. An elaborate system of coats-of-arms and other decoration was established, especially at city gates and portals to identify the sovereign power. Only a visitor familiar with the system would be able to read it.

¹⁷See Michel Parent and Jacques Verroust's study of the 16th century engineer and architect Vauban, in *Vauban* (Paris: Jacques Freal, 1971).

¹⁸For more information about divided Nicosia, see Nergis Canefe, "One Cyprus or Many? Turkish Cypriot History in Nicosia," *Identities in Space: Contested Terrains in the Western City since 1850*, eds. Simon Gunn and Robert J. Morris (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001). Among the many studies of Israel and Palestine are Derek Gregory's "Splintering Palestine," *B/ordering Space*, eds. Henk van Houtum, Olivier Kramsch, and Wolfgang Zierhofer (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005) and Oleg Grabar's *Jerusalem: Constructing the History of Islamic Art, Volume IV* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005). For a study of Cold War Berlin, see Jennifer A. Jordan, *Structures of Memory: Understanding Urban Change in Berlin and Beyond*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

the form of urban ghettoization. In the United States, this phenomenon has been likened to South African apartheid planning.¹⁹ Rather than walls and international boundary markers, the signs of such internal divisions come in the form of gang graffiti and other territorial gestures.²⁰ My dissertation considers the U.S.-Mexico border in light of this long interdisciplinary history.

1.2 U.S.-Mexico Border History

The 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the Mexican-American war and established the present-day border between the United States and Mexico. Five years later, on December 30, 1853, the United States negotiated the purchase of a 29,670 square mile region of present-day Arizona and New Mexico. This acquisition, the Gadsden Purchase, allowed for expanded railroad construction in the Southwest. Even the delineation of U.S. and Mexican territory proved culturally problematic. With the treaty's ratification, the Gadsden Purchase, and the detachment of Mexico's northern frontier, "approximately 100,000 Mexicans residing in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California became subjects of the U.S., forcing permanent severance of ties with the motherland."²¹

A mixture of Spanish, Anglo, and indigenous cultures has been endemic to the U.S.-Mexico border. Originally conceived of as a sparsely populated no-man's-land, the border region was characterized as "a line that separates progress from backwardness, order from chaos, lawfulness from lawlessness, honesty from corruption, and democracy from dominion by a privileged few."²² This description proved beneficial to U.S. nationalists hoping to prove the moral rectitude of the United States. In contrast, the U.S. and Mexican tourist industries capitalized on the image of lawlessness to promote the region.²³

¹⁹An analogy between U.S. ghettoization and South Africa comes from John Eyles, "Group Identity and Urban Space: The North American Experience," *Shared Space: Divided Space: Essays on Conflict and Territorial Organization*, eds. Michael Chisholm and David M. Smith (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990).

²⁰For an excellent study of urban gang graffiti in Los Angeles and its territorial dimensions, see Susan A. Phillips, *Wallbangin': Graffiti and Gangs in L.A.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

²¹Oscar J. Martínez, *Troublesome Border* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988), 80.

²²*Ibid.*, 100-101.

²³Oscar J. Martínez, *Border Boom Town: Ciudad Juárez Since 1848* (Tucson and London: University of Arizona Press, 1994), 59.

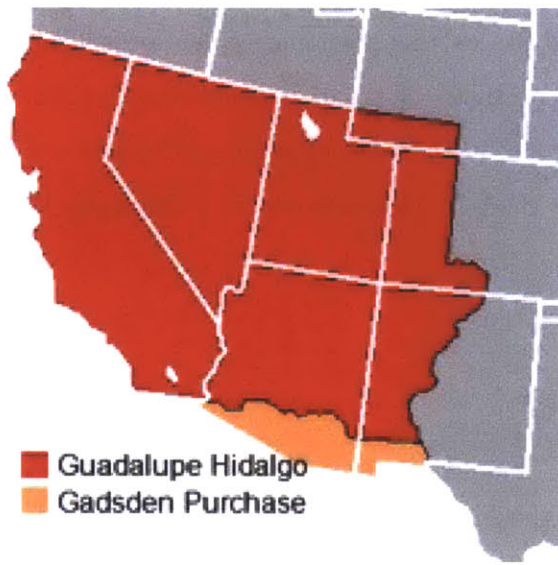


Figure 1-2: This map shows the areas acquired by the United States from Mexico. In 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the Mexican-American War and gave the territories shaded in red to the United States. The land shaded in yellow was sold by Mexico to the United States with the 1853 Gadsden Purchase. Map available online at <http://www.kvoa.com/news/important-document-in-arizona-s-history-on-display-tomorrow/>

The border became a place of urban development during the extended presidency of Porfirio Diaz (the Porfiriato, 1876-1910).²⁴ The earliest permanent border settlement, Ciudad Juárez (originally Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe), had been founded in 1659, but its subsequent industrial buildup occurred during the Porfiriato. The Mexican government expanded railroad networks to *El Norte*, or the northernmost Mexican states. Initially, mineral resources were at stake in this industrial development, which took advantage of free trade zones (*zona libre*) with the U.S. during the U.S. Civil War.²⁵ The free zones were eliminated in 1905, resulting in a decrease in trade, followed by an increase in tourism and tourist-related development. Due to the rise of industry, the border zone has, since the establishment of the present day boundary, been defined by the phenomenon of paired “sister cities.” In the border region, each major city on the Mexican side has its counterpart on the U.S. side, resulting in such metropolises as Tijuana-San Diego, Nogales-Nogales/Tucson, Matamoros-Brownsville, and Ciudad Juárez-El Paso. Several studies of these cities have

²⁴Daniel D. Arreola and James R. Curtis, *The Mexican Border Cities: Landscape Anatomy and Place Personality*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993), 13.

²⁵Martínez, *Border Boom Town* (1975), 14-17.

been conducted, including Oscar J. Martínez' *Border Boom Town* (1975) and Daniel D. Arreola and James R. Curtis' 1993 survey *The Mexican Border Cities: Landscape Anatomy and Place Personality*.²⁶ In several of these cases, the downtown areas of the two cities meet at the border, such as Juárez and El Paso. In the case of San Diego and Tijuana, however, almost twenty miles separate the urban centers. These cities are a product of the industrialization of Mexico's northern frontier that led to a condition Martínez has termed the "border paradox." Relative to the rest of the United States, the border region is an area of general poverty, representing economic hardship. Relative to the rest of Mexico, however, the border has the highest per capita incomes, and represents an area of wealth and opportunity.²⁷



Figure 1-3: U.S.-Mexico border cities. Map from http://mchb.hrsa.gov/mchirc/dataspeak/events/july_08/materials/mcdonald_files/textonly/slide2.html

Because of the economic prosperity of northern Mexico, the 1910 Mexican Revolution had a profound effect on the region and its inhabitants. That year, rebel forces overthrew the Porfiriato and launched a protracted struggle until 1920.²⁸ During this period, significant numbers of Mexicans fled to the United States. Perceiving that the security of the

²⁶Ibid. Also Daniel D. Arreola and James R. Curtis. *The Mexican Border Cities: Landscape Anatomy and Place Personality*, Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 1993. For more on general Latin American urbanism, see *I Saw a City Invincible: Urban Portraits of Latin America*, eds. Gilbert M. Joseph and Mark D. Szuchman (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Press, 1996).

²⁷Martínez, *Border Boom Town* (1975), 6.

²⁸For a detailed account of the Mexican Revolution and the resulting regime changes, see Alan Knight's two volume series, *The Mexican Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

border was impaired, and sensitive to the spread of violence on the Mexican side, the U.S. government ordered systematic military patrols.²⁹ During the Wilson administration, these patrols entered Mexico in the search for the revolutionary leader Pancho Villa.

The dynamic of the border changed again with the U.S. entrance into World War II and the shortage of labor due to mobilization. In 1942, the Bracero Program began, initiating the transfer of Mexican agricultural workers to the southwestern United States.³⁰ The program, named for the Spanish word for “manual laborer” (literally, “one who works with his arms”) lasted until 1964 and further integrated the economies of the United States and Mexico. The Mexican economy began to depend on the flow of funds from U.S.-based laborers to their families south of the border. But then, after 1964, Mexican workers living in the U.S. were forcibly deported as part of Operation Wetback. The experiences of immigrants during Operation Wetback would later inform the politics of the Chicano Movement and border art projects. That period of uncertainty had a profound effect on Chicano artist and BAW/TAF member Victor Ochoa: “My mom was just completely paranoid all the time. My dad was always changing names, and getting some kind of documentation so he could work. So eventually, immigration caught up with us and booted us out when I was seven.”³¹

In an attempt to attract U.S.-based industry to Mexico, the Mexican government instituted a series of tax breaks and other measures along the northern frontier. Goods could be manufactured in Mexico and transported almost without penalty into the United States, dramatically decreasing the cost of clothing, electronic equipment, and other household products. The 1970s-era Mexican *Programa Nacional Fronteriza* (PRONAF),³² emphasized commercial improvement and the urban/architectural beautification of the region.³³ Industrial zones were established within the various border towns, especially Ciudad Juárez in Chihuahua. The PRONAF zone, as it is called, was constructed in the early 1970s, a

²⁹Alan Knight, *U.S.-Mexican Relations, 1910-1940: An Interpretation* (San Diego: University of California Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, 1987), 1.

³⁰María Patricia Fernández-Kelly. *For We are Sold, I and My People: Women and Industry in Mexico's Frontier* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 26.

³¹Victor Ochoa, Interview with the author, January 14, 2010.

³²Literally, “National Border Program”

³³Fernández-Kelly, *For We are Sold, I and My People* (1983), 22-23.

space of industrial and cultural production to serve a burgeoning working class.³⁴ Employing primarily female workers, the factories (*maquiladoras*) “have created a new working contingent, expanding the size of the potential labor force while at the same time disenfranchising from its rank and file the majority of male workers.”³⁵ While the Mexican agricultural labor force was comprised primarily of men, the *maquiladoras* required skilled female workers for jobs in sewing and assembly lines.

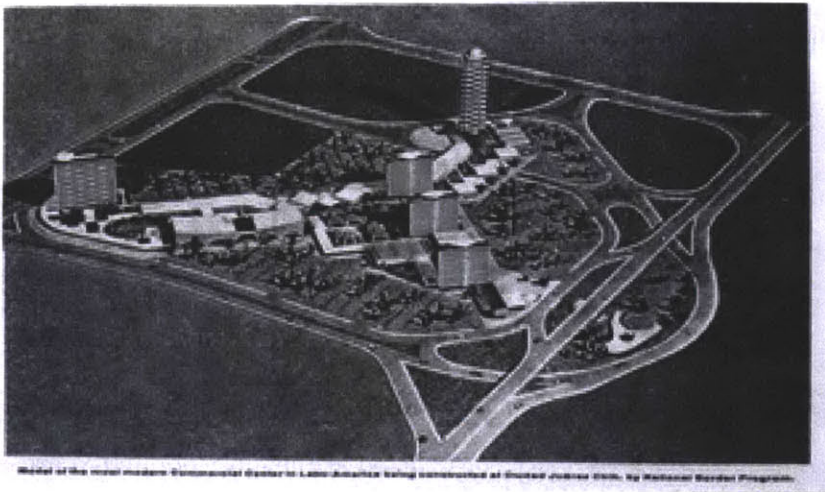


Figure 1-4: Artist rendering of the PRONAF zone in Ciudad Juárez. Model by PRONAF, image available online at http://thewhereblog.blogspot.com/2009_04_01_archive.html

With the development of industry in Mexico’s northern states, trade negotiations began to follow. 1994, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) opened trade across the entire continent – specifically the United States, Mexico and Canada. By reducing (and eventually eliminating) tariffs on goods from Mexico, the agreement intensified the perceived competition between U.S. and Mexican manufacturing interests. Anti-Mexican sentiment increased among the U.S. working class. At the same time, the devaluation of the peso, coupled with the U.S.-led takeover of agriculture in Mexico, created a situation of extreme poverty in the southern states, especially Chiapas and Veracruz. According to

³⁴Luis Alvarado (Pacto por la Cultura), Interview with the author, February 19, 2009.

³⁵Fernández-Kelly, *For We are Sold, I and My People* (1983), 45. Because the majority of maquiladora jobs were for skilled assembly and garment workers, female workers were in high demand. Men, largely skilled in construction and agriculture, were not considered especially suited for such work, and the situation led to high levels of male unemployment along the northern frontier. Mexican men, on the other hand, were more likely to cross the border looking for physically demanding agricultural work in the United States.

dependency theorists, farmers in these regions began to work only for the production of export goods, and as a result could not sustain the community or even their own extended families. Since NAFTA, the vast majority of undocumented crossings into the United States originate in these southern states.

Illegal border crossing had been predominant in the major urban centers, such as El Paso/Juárez and San Diego/Tijuana, with many immigrants simply hopping the border fence or finding a break in the structure. In 1986 the Reagan Administration passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which created the Border Patrol and led to an overall increase in defense of the border. The region became “militarized” through the IRCA and parallel measures intended to enforce security.³⁶ Present-day urban centers on the border are now heavily protected, with three separate fences dividing San Ysidro (the southernmost region of San Diego) from Tijuana and surveillance drone aircraft patrolling overhead. The Border Patrol benefited from other military technologies as well, including ground sensors that locate movement across significant distances. The most visible marker of militarization, however, has been the steel fence constructed at the most populated areas.

This military activity along the border has pushed the majority of undocumented crossings to the desert, where there is a marginally higher chance of success, yet also a chance of death. Migrants pay a *coyote* or *pollero* thousands of pesos to serve as a guide across the border and, in some cases, through the desert and to U.S. urban centers.³⁷ The

³⁶Because of this militarization, the border has become a space both public and private. It is public in the most obvious sense of the term – the focus of international attention, especially in contested regions. A nation’s borders are the points at which it makes contact with others, a public space of welcome or exclusion. The experience of being physically on the border, however, can also be private for a single individual. At San Diego’s Border Field State Park, for example, the fence dividing the United States from Mexico comes to an end in the Pacific Ocean. The barrier ends far enough into the water that swimming around it is considered too dangerous to attempt, and the constant watch of the U.S. Border Patrol renders vain any hope of undocumented passage. At the same time, there exists a spatial cocoon at the border. Electronically isolated by the Border Patrol’s frequency-jamming surveillance equipment, one who stands at the edge of the United States can have intensely private, isolating experience. Even crossing the border at the world’s busiest site, San Ysidro, provides a curious mixture of the public (waiting in line with thousands of others to enter/re-enter the U.S.) and the private (or violation thereof – the screenings, the searching, and those seemingly innocuous questions: “What was the purpose of your trip?” “Are you bringing anything back with you?”).

³⁷For a dramatized account of one such crossing that ended in disaster, see Luis Alberto Urrea’s *The Devil’s Highway: A True Story* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2004). Increased surveillance, militarization, and the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) forced illegal migration to the desert rather than in populated areas. This development will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.



Figure 1-5: The border fence, as seen from San Diego's Border Field State Park (2010). Image courtesy of the author.

stretch of Sonoran Desert in Arizona, termed the Devil's Highway, is the site of most post-IRCA desert crossings and has been the site of uncounted crossing deaths. The human rights implications of this situation have been the subject of much controversy and will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

Concerns surrounding illegal immigrants on the U.S.-Mexico border became widespread in the early twenty-first century, with the news media fueling fears of spreading drug violence.³⁸ Coupled with the female murders of the 1990s and 2000s (*feminicidias*) in Ciudad Juárez and the rise in tourist kidnappings in border towns, these incidents of violence have created a culture of fear associated with the region. I will discuss Ciudad Juárez and its particular situation at length in Chapter Five. Before the 2009 recession led to a decrease in immigration, apprehension (rational and irrational) surrounded the rising tide of illegal immigrants and resulting cheap labor.

Artists on the U.S.-Mexico border have had to take into account the complex po-

³⁸ "Phoenix is now home to one drug-related kidnapping every day" was a promotional line for the show *Border Wars* on the National Geographic Channel (2010). The border, immigration and the wave of drug-related violence became the subject for reality television.

litical and economic interdependence that drives immigration.³⁹ Immigrants from Mexico (and other Latin American countries) continue to perform a majority of the construction jobs in the United States; they are also responsible for meatpacking, custodial work, and agricultural labor. The U.S. economy and its consumers have adapted to the influx of cheap labor, to the point at which a complete shutdown of undocumented immigration would lead to financial destabilization. The stream of funds sent back to Mexico, in turn, increase the standard of living for relatives left behind.⁴⁰

Immigration and the constant flow of people and goods back and forth across the border have resulted in what Néstor García Canclini has termed “hybrid culture.” In 1990, García Canclini theorized Latin America as experiencing “an exuberant modernism with deficient modernization,” the result of “the sedimentation, juxtaposition, and interweaving of indigenous traditions (above all in the Mesoamerican and Andean areas), of Catholic colonial hispanism, and of modern political, educational, and communicational actions.”⁴¹ At the Mexican border, this hybridity is more pronounced due to the close contact with the United States. Television broadcast signals and radio stations move over the airwaves freely, penetrating the border from both sides. The cuisine of the region is a distinctly hybrid blend, with creations such as “Sonoran Hotdogs” gaining popularity.⁴² In turn, the cultural mixture created a concern over the border’s “demexicanization.”⁴³ Mexicans “came to share in a consumer language forged through state-sponsored cultural nationalism, import-substitution industrialization policies, and ironically, closer ties with the U.S.”⁴⁴

³⁹Not to be confused with the widely contested dependency theory, which states that the terms of trade of Latin American countries deteriorated over time: the price of the region’s primary product exports declined relative to the price of its industrial imports from the North Atlantic economies – unequal exchange creates economic exploitation. *How Latin America Fell Behind: Essays on the Economic Histories of Brazil and Mexico, 1800-1914*, ed. Stephen Haber (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 9.

⁴⁰The interdependence of the U.S. and Mexican economies is a subject of intense study in itself, and can be found in *International Migration: prospects and policies in a global market*, eds. Douglas S. Massey and J. Edward Taylor (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) as well as *NAFTA’s Impact on North America: the first decade*, ed. Sidney Weintraub (Washington D.C.: CSIS Press, 2004).

⁴¹Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, Trans. Christopher L. Chiappari and Silvia L. López (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

⁴²The Sonoran Hotdog “starts with a hot dog wrapped in bacon. Then you begin piling on the beans, grilled onions, fresh onions, tomatoes, mayonnaise, cream sauce, mustard and jalapeno salsa. Add radishes, cucumbers, whole chilies and even mushrooms, if you want.” National Public Radio: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=106366080>. The significance of the Sonoran Hotdog was first suggested to me by artist and former BAW/TAF member Victor Ochoa in San Diego.

⁴³Martínez, *Troublesome Border* (1988), 120.

⁴⁴Gilbert M. Joseph, Anne Rubenstein and Eric Zolov, “Assembling the Fragments: Writing a Cultural

The tensions at the U.S.-Mexico border are symptomatic of greater friction between the two nations, as well as the more general conflict between industrialized and developing nations. The immediacy of the border plays a role, as citizens of the United States and Mexico are in constant physical confrontation, rather than with the more abstract concept of foreign “outsourcing” of jobs. The long history of the region and the interconnectedness of its communities also provide border theorists and artists with a complex set of issues to address. Immigration, cultural hybridity, human rights violations, economic disparity, industrialization, and the concept of the nation-state all figure prominently in the discourses of the U.S.-Mexico border. In many cases, artists are the best equipped to navigate these disciplinary boundaries and allow for a re-conceptualization of the border.

1.3 History and Theory of “Border Art”

The history of artists’ interventions with the border and U.S.-Mexico relations dates to the early twentieth century. The Mexican Revolution sent many of the country’s citizens north to seek refuge in the United States. This wave of immigration and the political destabilization of the region garnered the attention of artists and theorists. In 1925, José Vasconcelos, former Secretary of Education (he had resigned in 1924), published *La Raza Cósmica*, a work detailing the process of racial mixing, or *mestizaje*, that he believed would eventually result in a fifth race, superior to all others. He claimed that “the civilization developed and organized in our times by the whites has set the moral and material basis for the union of all men into a fifth universal race, the fruit of all the previous ones and amelioration of everything past.”⁴⁵ The current age, the one preceding the cosmic one, was mired in conflict between what Vasconcelos termed “Anglo-Saxonism and Latinism.”⁴⁶ This particular view of evolution, one dependent on the mixing of races, cultures and civilizations, would permeate other aspects of Mexican life. Vasconcelos warned that if Latin Americans attempted to mimic Anglo-Saxon “intellectualism” and denigrate the Latin part of their

History of Mexico since 1940,” *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico since 1940*, eds. Gilbert Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, and Eric Zolov (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 10.

⁴⁵José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race/La Raza Cósmica*, Trans. Didier T. Jaén, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press: (1925) 1997), 9.

⁴⁶Ibid, 10.

heritage, another race would take their place as *la raza cósmica*.⁴⁷ In this manner, *mestizaje* was established as something separate from and superior to either dominant European culture or its American offspring. Although Vasconcelos' ideas were soon discredited, the image of *mestizaje* lingered in the Mexican (and Latin American) imaginary. *Mestizaje* would have its effects in the visual arts as well, as Vasconcelos prophesied:

Architecture will abandon the Gothic arch, the vault, and in general, the roof. . . the pyramid will again develop. . . the new aesthetics will try to adapt itself to the endless curve of the spiral, which represents the freedom of desire and the triumph of Being in the conquest of infinity.⁴⁸

The kinds of ideas fueling Vasconcelos were also present in the works of the Mexican muralists David Alfaro Siqueiros, José Clemente Orozco and Diego Rivera. For example, Orozco's 1922 mural *Cortes y La Malinche* at the National Preparatory School in Mexico City depicts an embodied border = the legendary "first encounter" between indigenous woman (La Malinche) and Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés. Orozco depicted the couple standing over a defeated indigenous body,⁴⁹ symbolizing the violence of conquest brought by their union. La Malinche had been one of Cortés' slaves, an indigenous woman who was said to have betrayed her race by giving valuable information to the conquistador. Their child was one of the first mixed, or *mestizo* children.⁵⁰ While the Malinche was often vilified for her role in the conquest, she reappears frequently in Mexican art as the progenitor of a new race. Of significance is the fact that although Cortés and la Malinche are both implicated in this story, it is the female figure who earns credit for creating the new race.

While the theory of *mestizaje* originated in the Mexican interior, it soon became a trope to characterize the mixture of cultures taking place at the U.S.-Mexico border. In

⁴⁷Didier T. Jaén, "Introduction." In José Vasconcelos, *La Raza Cósmica*, translated by Didier T. Jaén (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press: (1925) 1997), x.

⁴⁸Vasconcelos, *La Raza Cósmica* (1925), 24.

⁴⁹Although *mestizaje* is often linked with the glorification of indigenous cultures termed *indigenismo*, the heritage and history of the European/indigenous relationship is more complicated. *Mestizaje*, by necessity, entails the erasure of racial divisions, including those the indigenous cultures.

⁵⁰Spanish painting of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries attempted to address the subject of *mestizaje* on a scientific level. Rather than invoking ideas of a cosmic race or of greater enlightenment, concepts which would not become popular until the twentieth century, these *casta* paintings depicted the various pairings among the races and the resulting progeny. White European and indigenous would make a *mestizo*, while the mix of *mestizo* and European would produce a *castizo* people. The number of classifications depended on the artist or the author of the text.

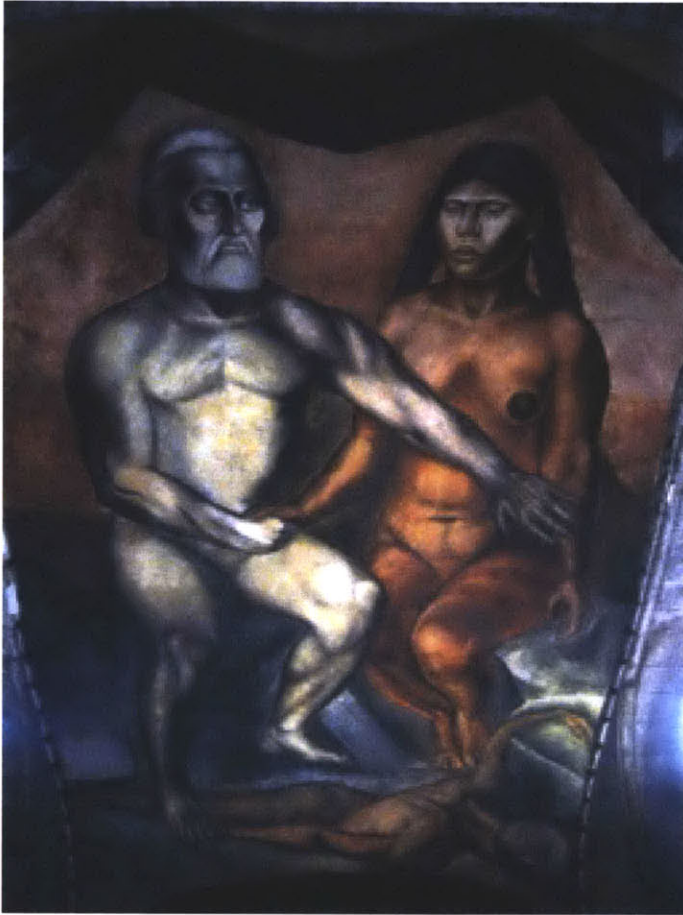


Figure 1-6: José Clemente Orozco, *Cortés y La Malinche* (1922). Colegio de San Ildefonso, Mexico City. Image available online at <http://arthistorylibrary.com/slides/orozco/slides/cortez%20%20malinche%20%20Mexico%201924.html>

this manner, *mestizaje*, once an internal representation of Latin America, became externalized and projected north. Chicana feminist author Gloria Anzaldúa, in her 1987 book *Borderlands=La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, connected *mestizaje* directly with the U.S.-Mexico border. Her narrator, the “new mestiza” emphasized class alliances with Mexican border-crossers. Anzaldúa chronicled the dehumanization of Mexican workers who cross to the United States and are hunted by the Border Patrol.⁵¹

Her characterization of the U.S.-Mexico border as a place of conflict is worth quoting at length:

⁵¹Sonia Saldívar-Hull, “Introduction” in Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands = La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, third edition (San Francisco, Aunt Lute Books, (1987), 2009), 3

The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* [is an open wound] where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants.⁵²

Anzaldúa's use of the blood metaphor links back to Vasconcelos' conception of *mestizaje*. In this case, however, it is not races coming together but nation-states, with the product not the "cosmic race" but the "new *mestiza*." For Anzaldúa, the border conflict is part of a larger cultural dynamic that dates back to the conquest. The bloodshed has migrated in the present day, to the "herida abierta" of the border, where the First World (in this case, the United States, rather than colonial Spain) grinds against the Third (Latin America, represented by Mexico).

Contrast Anzaldúa's depiction with that of performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña, recalling his time in the 1980s with the Border Art Workshop:

we really focused on the border as a site of possibilities, as a spiral model as opposed to a dividing line and with the whole idea of the artist as a social thinker, as a binational diplomat, as an alternative chronicler.⁵³

Artists such as Gómez-Peña find this place of friction and wounding a "site of possibilities." Among those possibilities was the chance to translate the experience of the border into other venues, eventually bringing U.S.-Mexico "border thinking" to other regions around the globe. It is also important to note Gómez-Peña's use of the word "spiral," with its echoes of Vasconcelos. Both authors use the spiral to represent freedom and possibility. The spiral also has cosmic overtones, an oblique reference to the spiral shape of galaxies and the concept of an infinite or ever-expanding universe.

⁵²Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands = La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, third edition. (San Francisco, Aunt Lute Books, (1987), 2009), 25.

⁵³Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Interview with the author, March 23, 2009. I will analyze Gómez-Peña's position more thoroughly in Chapter 3.

It is important to emphasize that while the history of Mexico, its intellectual and political formations are crucial to this study, this dissertation examines, in border thinking, a mostly U.S. phenomenon. The figures in my study are representative of a much larger group of thinkers and artists who reveal the issues of the border that reside at the heart of U.S. society. Art activists of the San Diego Chicano movement laid the foundation for art production dealing with the U.S.-Mexico border. Artists in Los Angeles and San Diego grappled with issues of identity politics and immigration. Ultimately, Chicano artists and thinkers were forced to negotiate the interests of U.S.-born Mexican-Americans and recently arrived immigrants, whether documented or otherwise. This tension, born in the United States, drew on deeply Mexican concepts to force art production to explore more universal themes of mestizaje and indigenismo, seeking to unite the populations of the border region. In contrast to this inclusive viewpoint, other artists and activists sought to characterize the U.S.-Mexico border as a place of unending conflict, a protracted struggle along the lines of the Vietnam War.

1.4 Dissertation Overview

The themes of Chicano art did not focus solely on the border, but Chicano artists were the first to conceptualize the border in terms of visual art. As I discuss in Chapter 2, Chicanos established institutions such as the Centro Cultural de la Raza (Cultural Center of the People) in downtown San Diego and Chicano Park in the city's Barrio Logan neighborhood. The struggle to obtain and maintain Chicano Park in San Diego culminated in the reclamation of this territory by the local Chicano community, and the park became home to the largest collection of Chicano Murals in a single location, serving as a highly visible symbol of both Chicanismo and the border. The Centro Cultural de la Raza would serve as an umbrella organization for the region's first border art collective, the binational Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo (BAW/TAF). Central to my study, the work of the BAW/TAF was initially focused on a physical border, but openly explored the theoretical and practical implications of the shift from site to mentality.

Absorbing the political activism of the Chicano Movement along with conceptual approaches from European Fluxus and the 1970s *Grupos* movement in Mexico, the BAW/TAF initially focused attention on the geographical borderline and the possibilities posed by site and site-specific work. In 1986, the group linked the border with performance art, staging their piece *End of the Line* directly on the line, at San Diego's Imperial Beach. The BAW/TAF members would go on to personify the historical development of border art. Artist and professor Michael Schnorr continued the BAW/TAF, in one sense, but complicated it in another, as he brought the workshop's particular brand of border art to locations around the globe. Performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña moved on from the group to explore broader aspects of border mentality, myths, and personas. His career thus encapsulates the shift from site-specificity to border-portability, a shift registered in his substantial body of theoretical writing. Gómez-Peña's collaborations with artist Coco Fusco and later, the members of his troupe *La Pocha Nostra*, chart the transition from site specificity to the more open concept of portability.

As this dissertation explores in depth, the discussion of global and portable borders and their role in performance art is necessarily tied to the idea of site-specificity. And yet, these works depend upon a complete redefinition of the term. Site-specificity immediately calls to mind examples of artworks wedded to their location, either physically or conceptually. For the "strongly" sited work, its very meaning hinges upon its physical context. Removed from the site, such artworks ultimately lose part or all of their meaning.⁵⁴

Sitedness can take many forms. The friezes, metopes and pedimental sculptures from the Parthenon of Athens were removed in 1812 by the Earl of Elgin to be displayed at the British Museum in London. It is clear that a large part of their meaning has been altered simply by the change of venue. In the gallery, the marbles are viewed on their own, rather than as part of a complex architectural-sculptural program. The example of the Parthenon is, ultimately, a flawed one, for the situation of ancient sculptures on the

⁵⁴For a full discussion of site and site specificity, see Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2002). Also Thomas Crow, "Site-Specific Art: The Strong and the Weak" in *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale U.P., 1996), 131–150 and Jason Gaiger, "Dismantling the Frame: Site-Specific Art and Aesthetic Autonomy" in *British Journal of Aesthetics* 49 (2009): 43–58.

Acropolis is distinct from that of performance art on the U.S.-Mexico border. I will argue that the performative border presents a distinct kind of site-specificity, and that therefore, a different relationship to site is being negotiated.⁵⁵

In this discussion of site, it will become obvious that one specific medium plays a dominant role: performance. Performance art is necessarily rooted in a specific time and place, down to the bodies of the artists taking part. Yet if a piece is performed several times, across several venues and with a changing roster of performers, as is the case with Gómez-Peña's troupe La Pocha Nostra, it is clear that the work changes with each repetition. Leaving aside the resulting question of authenticity in performance (a problem that remains unresolved) I will examine the relationship of performance art to a physical site. **Situated performance art creates a dialogue between audience and site, with the site becoming an integral component of the performance.** Such works taking place on the U.S.-Mexico border attempt to communicate the specifics of the border – often an intangible and abstract concept – to a wider audience. When a site-specific work is removed from its intended location, or when a performance is repeated in a variety of venues, there is a tangible effect. Whether this effect is intentional, meaning that the work is meant to be portable, or a consequence of the global art market, can alter the interpretation of the work. In the case of the U.S.-Mexico border, I will argue that **it was necessary for artists to disengage from the physical site in order to reinterpret the border for other regions.**

At the same time that art production began to move away from the physical line in the late 1980s/early 1990s, there was a surge of interest renewing 1970s concepts of site-specific art production. Featured in this study, the binational art festival InSite (1992-2005) garnered tremendous media attention for its attention-grabbing performances and installations. Artists such as Mexican-born Marcos Ramírez ERRE, the aforementioned Venezuelan Javier Téllez, and Chilean-born Alfredo Jaar produced some of InSite's best remembered projects. For these artists, the border served as an outlet to explore the intersection of politics and art, a recurring theme in each of their careers. Does this mean that the border is but one politically charged locale among many? Or is it in fact a place

⁵⁵ A fuller discussion of site-specificity will follow in Chapter Three. In Chapter Four, I will discuss Robert Smithson's idea of the "non-site" and its applicability to the later works of Guillermo Gómez-Peña.

of experimentation where artists can develop new ideas concerning art and social change, or art and globalization?

1.5 Chapter Overview

This introduction (Chapter 1) has analyzed what I call the “border problematic” in art, and in art history. I have attempted to define “border” in a number of ways, as well as demonstrate the need for (and the impossibility of) a comprehensive border theory. Chapter 2 specifically analyzes the Chicano movement of the 1960s and 70s, where art of the border region (specifically Los Angeles and San Diego) developed as a social imperative. Chicano artists attempted to recapture the politically engaged mural art of the 1920s and 30s that had been epitomized by Mexican artists such as Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros.⁵⁶ The Chicano movement was caught between the interests of established Mexican-Americans and newly arrived immigrants; artists attempted to connect these different groups through ideal of *mestizaje*.

Chapter 3 then moves to the beginnings of “border art” in San Diego-Tijuana in the 1980s, with the site-specific works of the BAW/TAF. As mentioned above, this group pushed the concept of “border art” from being deeply rooted in Chicano mythology to emphasizing international alliances and political issues outside the Chicano agenda. The group brought conceptual art to border thinking, with the specific engagement of the Mexican artist and Fluxus member **Felipe Ehrenberg**. Chapter 4 will continue with the crucial influence of the BAW/TAF’s shift from site specificity to portability in the early 1990s. Here I will argue that artists anticipated two major events, the Columbus Quincentennial in 1992 and the 1994 enactment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with the shift from a literal boundary to a more pervasive “border condition.” This shift plays out in Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s concept of the “portable border.”

The fifth chapter analyzes the globally informed return to site popularized by the InSite organization in San Diego-Tijuana in the early twenty-first century. This site-specific

⁵⁶Both had achieved great cross-border success.

imperative coincided with a highly publicized increase in violence and drug trafficking on the border, as well as continued deaths related to illegal crossings. Although InSite commissioned art that would examine its own specific border situation, I will also examine related projects in the sister cities of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez that have responded more directly to border violence and militarization. In the conclusion, I suggest the influence of U.S.-Mexico border art on artists problematizing other borders (Palestine/Israel, India/Pakistan, Puerto Rico/United States). Without art, “the border” is difficult to materialize, and cannot be theorized as easily or made portable. The ideas of the border have been able to resonate globally because artists have been able to conceptualize them as such.

Chapter 2

The Chicano Border

We who live in the Vietnam of Aztlán must be on the front line, fighting against the massive violations of human rights and dignity our people have been forced to suffer.

- Call for Community Unity, Committee on Chicano Rights Pamphlet, c. 1972¹

You tell your people that when I'm elected, I'll sure take care of those bean belching border bounders. I'll string up barbed wire from Florida to Tortilla Flats, California. Yep, I certainly will not tolerate any Chicanery against Chicanos.

- H. "Scoop" Jackson (Citizens for Jackson), letter to Herman Baca, 1972²

In April of 1970, the residents of San Diego's Mexican-American Barrio Logan neighborhood were roused from their morning activities. Bulldozers had come from the municipality to clear a section of land located under the Coronado Bridge. Situated under the bridge and comprising a thicket of massive concrete pillars and structural supports, the area had been vacant for years. In 1968 the city of San Diego had promised 1.6 acres of the tract to the Barrio Logan community as parkland, but officially, the deal had never been

¹Herman Baca Papers, University of California San Diego, Mandeville Special Collections Library. Box 10, Folder 19.

²Herman Baca Papers. Box 6, Folder 3.

completed.³ In 1970, the city approved plans to build a police precinct on the site, and by April 20th, the bulldozers had arrived to prepare the land.⁴

The following morning, the residents of Barrio Logan engaged in the kind of dramatic social protest epitomized in the great movements of the 1960s. The Chicano Movement had been the direct inheritor of their legacy. The Barrio Logan residents formed a human chain, surrounding the vacant land and declaring it their own. On April 22nd, the Chicano activists took up shovels as a symbol of the desire to build their own park on the spot.⁵ For twelve days, they stood, supported with food and water from the rest of the community, until the city of San Diego once again promised a park. On July 1, 1970, the city approved substantial funds to convert the land into a suitable park, officially named “Chicano Park.”⁶ The site took three years to develop, but by 1973 the first large-scale murals adorned the scansions, signaling the Chicano presence to Barrio Logan and the rest of San Diego.

The murals of Chicano Park have stood for four decades as a visual reminder of the struggles of the Mexican-American community, as well as a lesson in the history and mythology of a specific group. Painted by such artists as Salvador “Queso” Torres, Yolanda M. López, Guillermo Aranda and Victor Ochoa, the murals coalesce Chicano thought and activism into allegories depicting gods, heroes, indigenous ancestors, Spanish conquistadors and mythical creatures – in all, they comprise the fullest expression of Chicano art in San Diego. Chicano Park, the most visible victory of the Movement, produced a legacy of art and social change that would directly influence the development of U.S.-Mexico border art.

I would argue that art of the border, with its attention to social issues, began with the Chicano movements of San Diego and Los Angeles. While these movements are often cited as sources of influence,⁷ this chapter demonstrates that Chicano Art is in fact the first “border art,” even before the term came into common use. The Chicano Movement’s

³Eva Cockroft, “The Story of Chicano Park.” *Aztlán* 15 (1984): 81.

⁴*Chicano Park*, directed by Marilyn Mulford and Maria Barrera (1989).

⁵Cockroft, “The Story of Chicano Park” (1984), 82.

⁶*Chicano Park* (1989).

⁷Among the many who have written on the BAW/TAF’s inspirations, former collective member D. Emily Hicks provides a thorough analysis of the dynamics in her forthcoming work for *Latin American Perspectives*. Jo-Ann Berelowitz also links the Chicano movement to border art in general in “Border Art since 1965” in *Postborder City: Cultural Spaces of Baja California*, eds. Michael Dear and Gustavo Leclerc (New York, Routledge, 2003).

connection with the border was tangible and extremely complicated, especially in the city of San Diego. Self-identified Chicanos, as well as other Mexican-Americans and Latinos living in the United States, were forced to mediate between their connections on the other side of the border and their status as U.S. citizens or legal residents. Chicano art betrayed that tension, often portraying the mythical homeland, “Aztlán,” including the territory lost to the United States in the Mexican-American War and the Gadsden Purchase, rather than depicting the reality of contemporary Mexico. In doing so, Chicano artists sidestepped the political, social and economic issues surrounding the border, but drew their inspiration directly from its charged milieu.

The Chicano movements of San Diego and Los Angeles would have a profound effect on later border art production. I will focus on the art production in these two cities, rather than other towns, because of their direct influence upon the border and the highly politicized art it generated. In Southern California, more than any other location, art, politics and the socioeconomic reality of the border came together with equal importance in a single milieu. The San Diego Chicanos brought ideas and strategies for melding art and social activism, with particular attention to the border. Los Angeles connected more closely with the art world and desired to translate the concerns of the US-Mexico border to a more widespread audience.

It is not surprising that Southern California looms so large in my history of border art. This massively populated region was the locus for the first formal Chicano activist organization. Student activists gathered in April of 1969 for the first Chicano Youth Liberation Conference at the University of California, Santa Barbara.⁸ The conference featured

⁸ “Chicano” refers to the late 1960s and early 1970s movement dedicated to improving the conditions of Latin Americans, specifically, Mexicans living in the United States. It is important to note that Chicanismo was initiated in the United States, and is not directly connected to Mexico. The term “Chicano” has undetermined origins; the word was possibly a mispronunciation of “Mexicano” (“MeCHicano”) originally used by Anglo Americans to refer to Mexican migrants. With the start of the movement, “Chicano” became a term of empowerment, reappropriated by the Mexican-American community to connote a particular subset of the population. Much like the Black Panthers’ claiming “black” as a positive quality, Chicanos stressed that which had originally served to classify and discriminate. The Chicano Movement grew out of those earlier 1960s protest movements, not only the Black Panthers, but also the Civil Rights Movement, women’s right’s groups, and numerous anti-war student groups. Agricultural unionization was also a key component. On September 16, 1965, César Chávez led Mexican farm workers in Delano, CA in a strike (with Filipinos) against the grape growers of California. This strike was the first significant action of the United Farm Workers (UFW) and proved the catalyst for more cohesive Chicano organizations. As with its precursors,

poetry by Alurista, the “intellectual architect of the concept of Aztlán,” particularly his conception of “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán” (“The Spiritual Plan of Aztlán”).⁹ Alurista, born Alberto Baltazar Urista Heredia in Mexico City, was a founding member of the Chicano Youth movement and would go on to play a significant role in the takeover of Chicano Park.¹⁰ As Claudia Sadowski-Smith elaborates, “Aztlán drew on the Nahuatl myth of an envisioned return to the place from which the Mesoamerican Aztecs migrated to today’s Mexico. . . .Aztlán became the foundational notion of Chicana/o studies at the time of their institutionalization in the U.S. academy.”¹¹ In claiming this territory for themselves, Chicanos portrayed Aztlán not only as an ancient place of origin, but also as their lost homeland in the southwestern United States, a “rightful ownership” of territory including the metropolises of San Diego and Los Angeles.

Activists focused on claiming these contemporary spaces for Mexican-Americans, rather than dwelling on what had been lost. The “Plan of Aztlán,” consisted of the following program:

El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán sets the theme that the Chicanos (La Raza de Bronze) must use their nationalism as the key or common denominator for mass mobilization and organization. . . we can only conclude that social, economic, cultural, and political independence is the only road to total liberation from oppression, exploitation, and racism. Our struggle then must be for the control of our barrios, campos, pueblos, lands, our economy, our culture, and our political life. El Plan commits all levels of Chicano society - the barrio, the campo, the rancho, the writer, the teacher, the worker, the professional - to La Causa.¹²

the Chicano Movement began as student-led activism, originating in Santa Barbara but rapidly spreading to Mesa College (San Diego), University of California Los Angeles, and others. In 1968, students at San Diego State University (SDSU) formed the Mexican American Youth Association (MAYA), the unified student branch of the Chicano movement. On March 7 of that year, the first urban mass protest by Mexican-Americans took place – a 10,000-student walkout across sixteen high schools in Los Angeles. The group expressed concerns over the treatment of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans by the police and also demanded equality in education, social services and employment opportunities. Brent Beltran, Interview with the author, National City, CA, April 15, 2009. Also Isidro Ortíz, “¡Sí, Se Puede! Chicana/o Activism in San Diego at Century’s End,” *Chicano San Diego*, ed. Richard Griswold del Castillo (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007), 130.

⁹Isidro Ortíz, “¡Sí, Se Puede! Chicana/o Activism in San Diego at Century’s End.” In *Chicano San Diego*, ed. Richard Griswold del Castillo (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007), 132.

¹⁰Isidro Ortíz, Interview with the author, San Diego, CA, April 27, 2010.

¹¹Claudia Sadowski-Smith, “Twenty-First Century Chicana/o Border Writing.” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 105 (2006): 717.

¹²“El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán,” MEChA archive online, accessed June 11, 2010, <http://studentorgs.utexas.edu/mecha/archive/plan.html>.

Most significant to the Plan was the idea that “all levels of Chicano society” were to be included in the action. This focus on community, from the professional class to agricultural workers, emphasized the fact that Chicano nationalism was not framed as a class struggle, but as a unifying force. This idea of the “Chicano Nation” is itself a paradox – a nation without a state. Chicano leaders focused on the idea of nation as “people” or “tribe” in the model of Native American tribal nations. The symbolism inherent in the term “nation” served as a unifying force for disenfranchised Mexican-Americans and recent Mexican immigrants.

Artist and theorist David Avalos argues that Aztlán was in fact opposed to the internationalism surrounding the U.S.-Mexico border. According to the former BAW/TAF member, “[The concept of Aztlán] operated to a certain extent with tension between this international idea that there is no border between Mexico and the Southwest, the idea of ‘Sin Fronteras.’”¹³ His observation is accurately grounded, but I would add that nationalism and internationalism are not a simple binary opposition in relation to the border. Chicano nationalism is a concept that transcends the border, both literally – consuming the territory of two separate nations – and metaphorically, by focusing on the people rather than geographic territory. The tension between the two approaches does not preclude their overlap.

With Aztlán, the mythical homeland, Chicanos established a theoretical connection to the U.S.-Mexico border, approaching the idea of internationalism from another angle. The approximate geographic area claimed extended from Mexico and Central America in the south to the area encompassing present-day Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada and Southern California. Chicanismo was not simply a subset of identity politics, a means to subvert the Europeanized label “Hispanic,” but a geographically rooted territorial claim. The U.S.-Mexico border cuts through the heart of this territory, dividing not only the land, but also the population it contains.¹⁴ Chicanos, in emphasizing the unity of Aztlán

¹³David Avalos, Interview with the author, San Diego, CA, April 25, 2010. “Sin Fronteras,” as described by the Los Angeles-based organization CASA (Centro de Acción Social Autónoma, founded 1975), proposed that “there isn’t a border between our people but rather a continuum, a social connection, a cultural connection, and economic connection between those of us on this side of an international line and others on the other side of an international line.”

¹⁴The term “Chicano” is used almost exclusively on the U.S. side of the border, however.

and its people, were forced to mediate between this mythological construct and its sharply divided reality. Artists in particular found inspiration in this tension between “what is” and “what should be.” In this manner, Chicanos were forced to deal with the border and its socio-political implications, at the same time enforcing it against the pressures of global capital. This tension between mythologizing Chicanismo and providing a factual account of its origins proved fruitful for the later generation of border artists, who were also forced to negotiate these opposing concerns.

Chicanismo and the border were linked by Vasconcelos’ racial theory of *mestizaje*,¹⁵ described in the first chapter. Vasconcelos had argued in 1925 that racial mixing was an inevitability, with the four “global” races uniting to produce a fifth, or “cosmic” race. Latin America, he argued, was the ideal site for the emergence of *la raza cósmica*, because of its blending of indigenous, African, Caucasian and Asian populations. According to Holly Barnet-Sanchez, the Chicanos “transform and radicalize [racial and cultural *mestizaje*] by making works of literary, visual, and performing arts that combine, reformulate, and re-present the additional sources, layers, and experiences that shape and constitute their historically based and discursively constructed identities as politicized Mexican American in the United States in the mid- to late-twentieth century.”¹⁶ In other words, Chicanos re-envisioned *mestizaje* as a means to reconfigure the dominant Anglo-American narrative.

I would argue that this strategy was not necessarily a whimsical choice of Chicano artists, however, for much of their political activism served as a response to practical considerations. In 1968, Chicano leaders in San Diego resolved to move beyond student action and reach out to the general community. Herman Baca, Betty Suarez, Ralph Inzunza, Michael Castro and Carlos Vasquez founded the Committee on Chicano Rights (CCR) with the goal of developing and improving the “political, educational, social and economic conditions of Chicanos by encouraging their participation in political, community and civic affairs.”¹⁷

¹⁵The term *mestizo* originated with Spanish colonization, intended to describe the offspring of indigenous and Caucasian parents.

¹⁶Holly Barnet-Sanchez, “Radical Mestizaje in Chicano/a Murals” in Alejandro Anreus, Leonard Folgarait, Robin Adele Greeley, eds., *Mexican Muralism: a critical history* (forthcoming, University of California Press, 2012), 350.

¹⁷CCR articles of incorporation, Baca Archive, Box 6, Folder 1. Membership in the CCR was open to everyone, regardless of ability to pay the annual dues.

Political activism and organization was the primary goal, for Baca characterized people of Mexican ancestry as an “invisible minority” with the potential to enact significant change.¹⁸ Calling the U.S. Southwest the “Vietnam of Aztlán,” the CCR portrayed the border zone and the resulting cultural conflict as a nebulous war with no end in sight.¹⁹

It was the controversy surrounding immigration, however, and the economic scaffolding surrounding the U.S. demand for cheap labor, that connected Chicano activism to the U.S.-Mexico border. Chicano organizers, primarily concerned with political activism and organization, faced a particular challenge in dealing with families of Mexican ancestry:

The objectives we were trying to accomplish weren't as simple as we thought they were going to be. For concerned political representation, we just thought it was a matter of going out and registering people. Elect some officials, and the problem's over, we can go home! We can enjoy the American dream. But that wasn't the case. Immigration kept popping up - some families would have individuals that were U.S.-born, other family members that were in the process of getting their documents, and some that had no documents. So there was a lot of fear in getting involved, because of that specter of calling attention to themselves and having family members arrested or deported because of their immigration status.²⁰

Bert Corona, a Chicano political organizer with thirty-five years of experience in the various civil rights movements, united the immigration controversy and Chicano rights. Baca and the other CCR founders, after recognizing the connection, brought immigration into the mainstream of Chicano activism.

We can contrast the CCR's position the immigration question with that espoused by other members of the community. Many Mexican-Americans, including some Chicano activists, were not of a single voice on the immigration question. Baca and his mentor Corona had been the first to cast the immigration question in terms of Chicano rights. As witnessed

¹⁸Herman Baca, Interview with the author, April 27, 2010.

¹⁹CCR “Call for Community Unity.” Baca Archive, Box 10, Folder 19. It is important to note that Chicano activism and the politics of Mexico were never in alignment. The Mexican political system, long dominated by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, or PRI) was decidedly authoritarian. Chicano politics only intersected with that of Mexico when dealing with immigration, legal and illegal.

²⁰Baca, Interview with the author (2010).

by H. “Scoop” Jackson’s letter to Baca, promising to “take care of those bean-belching border bounders,” many established second- and third-generation Mexican-Americans harbored a degree of anxiety about undocumented or illegal immigrant workers. César Chávez himself, in his call to unionization, advocated the hiring of Mexican- and Filipino-Americans rather than non-unionized immigrants. It is clear that Jackson’s campaign committee was not woefully misguided, for in fact Chicano leaders were sharply divided on the subject.

Baca and Corona worked to cast the immigration question in terms of a larger system, hoping to appeal to Chicano activists working against the interests of immigrants. Although often categorized by U.S. authorities as a problem or threat, the combined structure of labor and immigration on the border can best be described as a system. According to Baca, the U.S. addiction to cheap labor, drugs and other goods and services in the gray market generated a system that demands economic disparity across the border.²¹ Citing the United States’ reliance on cheap labor dating back to African-American slavery and the Dust Bowl migrants of the 1930s, Baca and the Chicano leadership linked Mexican-American political issues with a long-standing history of systematic exploitation of inequities.

Mexican immigrant workers first came across the border in large numbers at the start of the Bracero Program, the World War II-era policy intended to augment the U.S. workforce. Described in the introduction, the program continued well beyond its intended duration, ensuring a steady supply of underpriced labor as the U.S. economy grew dramatically in the 1950s. In its implementation, the program encouraged illegal or undocumented immigration. Rather than submit the necessary paperwork, a migrant worker could cross illegally and obtain employment. If apprehended by immigration authorities, the worker would be brought to Mexico and handed the proper documents to re-enter the United States. He (or she) could then cross the border with employment guaranteed – an action fully sanctioned by the U.S. government.²²

With the end of the Bracero Program in 1964, the United States resolved to put an end to illegal immigration as well. All subsequent measures, however, have been directed

²¹Ibid.

²²David Avalos, Interview with the author, April 25, 2010.

towards containment of the so-called “immigration problem” rather than its complete cessation. Chicano activists of the 1960s and 70s blamed the U.S. politico-financial complex for the situation, citing the number of businesses profiting heavily from the supply of underpaid labor. Baca, his mentor Corona, and other prominent Chicano leaders targeted the agricultural, meatpacking and tourist sectors as the worst offenders.²³ The Chicano position was seemingly contradictory: in order to improve the status of Mexican and Latin American immigrant workers, it would be necessary first to enforce the border completely. Only then could the true value of the migrant workers be assessed. In retrospect, the Chicano Movement of the 1970s could not change the official policy towards immigration and labor. The United States government continued to pursue border militarization throughout the 1980s and 1990s without completely shutting down the flow of workers, goods, and services.

Chicano activism and theory has, since its inception, focused on redefining the U.S.-Mexico relationship as one of systematized addiction. The addicts, in this case, were the United States and its (Anglo) inhabitants, scapegoats for much of Chicano rhetoric of the 1970s. Chicano community leader Vic Villalpando criticized the Anglo attitude toward “the sleepy Mexican” in his 1972 letter:

For years, insensitive and unscrupulous individuals have selfishly exploited Mexican artifacts [sic]...for monetary gains; caring little of the symbolism. This symbolism...is the rudiment of my people’s demoralized condition and also the reason for the White man’s negative attitude towards the Mexican-American.²⁴

Villalpando, among others, reacted to the stereotypes of Mexicans prevalent in an Anglo community that derived tremendous benefit from cheap, often tax-free labor. In the majority of these cases, it is important to note that Mexican and Mexican-American stereotypes persisted in the realm of the visual. The “Sleepy Mexican” drawing mentioned by Villalpando was one common trope, but others were also documented, including negative portrayals of indigenous people.²⁵

²³Baca, Interview with the author (2010)

²⁴Vic Villalpando, “Letter to Niek Slijk” March 17, 1972. Baca Archive, Box 6, Folder 3. It is ironic that the stereotype of “sleepy,” laid-back Mexicans persisted, even though Mexican immigrants in the region were extremely overworked and underpaid.

²⁵Most commonly, the naming of high school or college mascots after native or indigenous stereotypes.

Given the similarities between the Chicano movement's goals, ending the cheap labor addiction and smoothing the immigrant assimilation process, and the intentions of the anti-immigration Right, it could be argued that Chicano activists sought to strengthen the border. In fact, Chicano organizers saw the enforcement of immigration legislation as a means to an end. By initially supporting a closed border, Chicano leaders hoped that the resulting economic disaster would convince the general public of the need for a more open immigration policy. Only through such drastic measures, Baca argued, could the country's total dependence on undocumented laborers become apparent. In contrast, much of the anti-immigration rhetoric was (and continues to be) rooted in deep racial and ethnic biases, with its supporters envisioning a "return" to a purely white America (with a secret pipeline to lower labor costs via those same illegal workers). In practice, however, the two points of view were often confused, leading to strange alliances such as that between the Chicanos and the right-wing politician H. "Scoop" Jackson. The above characterization of the U.S.-Mexico border as a system proved to be highly abstract for the concerns of everyday life, however, and Chicano activists spent much of the 1970s working instead on incremental change. The primary concerns of most Mexican-Americans were daily fears of police brutality and unwarranted deportation. Instances of U.S. citizens of Mexican descent being forcibly brought to Mexico were rampant, and their treatment at the hands of the arresting officers was often abusive. In 1972, Chicano activists started the "Border Project" for the purpose of "securing signed statements from people who have personally been a witness to or who have been unfortunate enough to have been a victim of mis-conduct [*sic*] by Border officials."²⁶ This project compiled statements such as that of Martha Elena Parra López on June 7, 1972:

After a long struggle with this officer until my strength was out, he stripped me completely and violated me, he made a statement and said 'I hope you do not have any disease', he then told me to get dress [*sic*] and to get out of the patrol car and go to my country.²⁷

Parra López' statement was not an isolated case; Chicano leaders claimed that from 1938

²⁶Vic Villalpando, "Letter to Herman Baca." February 15, 1972. Baca Archive Box 6, Folder 3.

²⁷Martha Elena Parra López, Witness Statement June 6, 1972. Baca Archive Box 6, Folder 3.

through 1970 there had been over five hundred police related killings in metro San Diego and only one ensuing prosecution.²⁸ While this statistic does not explain the number of cases either racially-motivated or related to immigration, the Mexican-American community clearly perceived themselves to be the target of excessive police action.

Chicano art, therefore, was charged with this set of tasks from the beginning – to mediate between mundane concerns and fears of deportation, to document abuse, to encourage the consolidation of the Chicano community, and to educate Mexican-Americans in their shared past. According to Baca, art and the written word were the “tools to educate our people” influencing “how [they] perceive society.”²⁹ This duty fell to the Chicano artists to communicate most directly with the people and tap into longstanding emotional undercurrents. Artist Victor Ochoa described the role of art within the larger movement:

The Chicano Art movement paralleled to the art movement in general, so that was the other thing that I thought was important to me, was that artists were part of the movement, of the general movement. And it also seems to me that the way indigenous people and Mexicans looked at artists as part of society, as a piece of society that I think there was some not only respect, but that the community would listen to you.³⁰

It is important to note here that Ochoa’s conception of the tradition of the artist dates back to the indigenous sense, rather than to the Western Renaissance professionalization of art. In this manner, Chicano artists created a parallel timeline that bypassed the Western canon altogether. Barnet-Sanchez describes this process as one of “radical mestizaje” in which Chicano art was used to “connect Mexico to the United States, bring the past into the present, and join the practice of art to political and social activism.”³¹

While Barnet-Sanchez uses this idea to account for Chicano muralism, the concept of radical mestizaje can be taken further. The mixture of indigenous and Western art

²⁸Herman Baca, Conversation with Luis Torres of KABC Radio, San Diego CA. July 21, 1970. Baca Archive, Box 6, Folder 3.

²⁹Baca, Interview with the author (2010).

³⁰Victor Ochoa, Interview with the author, January 14, 2010. This idea is reflected in Ochoa’s own work, which consists of community- and school-based mural projects in the San Diego-Tijuana area. Murals, he claims, are a means to educate the public about a shared (if somewhat forgotten) history.

³¹Barnet-Sanchez, “Radical Mestizaje in Chicano/a Murals” (2011), 350.

permeated not only the visual language of Chicano art, but also its underlying mythology – the foundations of Chicanismo and its connection to U.S. and Mexican culture. Artists including Mario Torero deeply mythologized their role as artists and also the origin of art. Torero emphasized the indigenous roots of Chicanismo by stating that “as Aztecs, Mayans and Incas, we do not separate the different areas. To us, life is art and art is life, from the moment we begin. . .”³² A connection to the Cosmic Race is evident in Torero’s mural paintings, which often utilize obscure cosmological allegories to illustrate Chicano history and theory. Torero sought to uncover connections beyond that of art and life, including the unity of the cosmos.

Chicano organizer Baca saw the link between art and the rest of the movement in a more pragmatic way, focusing on the fact that “art and writing are tools from individuals who have that special talent to educate our people. That has been the tie between the Chicano movement and the writers and artists and poets. Their work influences for better or for worse how our people perceive society, how they perceive themselves.”³³ Citing Yolanda M. López’ famous poster design depicting the Pilgrims as “the first illegal aliens,” Baca demonstrated how posters, murals, and other public artworks could communicate political messages far more effectively than pamphlets and speeches.³⁴

In keeping with Baca’s focus on public art, mural painting became the most prevalent form of Chicano artistic expression. A smaller number of artists in the San Diego area worked with poster and graphic arts, easel painting, and mixed media installations. Mexican muralism’s second wave had started in Chicago in the 1960s, with artists such as William Walker, John Weber, Ray Patlán and Mark Rogovin taking their influence directly from the *Tres Grandes* – Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros.³⁵ For the Chicano movement, however, the locus of greatest activity was in California, where different forms of expression proved prevalent in different regions. Southern California, especially

³²Mario Torero, Interview with the author, February 14, 2010. The Peruvian-born Torero, more than other Chicano artists, was deeply influenced by concepts of the spiritual nature of art and indigenismo. This viewpoint is not universally reflected in Chicano art.

³³Baca, interview with the author (2010).

³⁴For their promotional materials, including brochures, the Committee on Chicano Rights often used comic-style illustrations by artists such as David Avalos to punctuate their arguments.

³⁵Shifra M. Goldman, *Dimensions of the Americas: Art and Social Change in Latin America and the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 118.

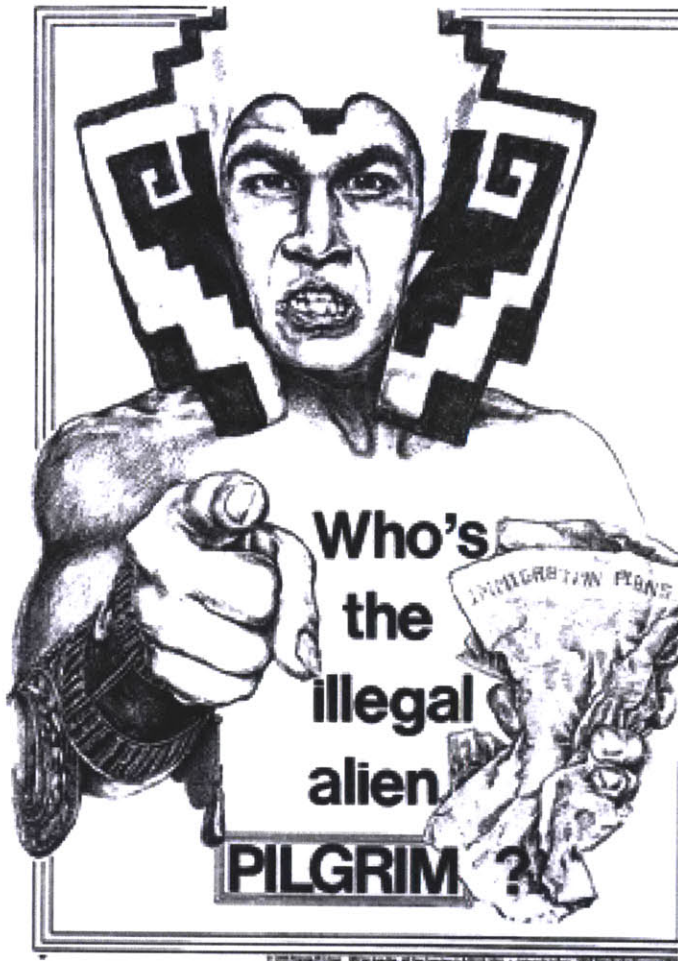


Figure 2-1: Yolanda M. López, *Who's the illegal alien, pilgrim?* (1978). Poster and image courtesy of Herman Baca.

San Diego and Los Angeles, served as the locus for widespread mural painting. The climate of these cities, as well as the urban framework, allowed for an explosion of murals during the 1970s, many painted in homage to the original Mexican *Tres Grandes*. East Los Angeles College, in particular, commissioned the largest mural in East L.A. from faculty member Roberto Chávez. The mural, a surrealist vision of Chicano imagery, was located on the side of the College's Edison Center for the Arts.

Muralism became the means for asserting this manufactured Chicano identity in the space of the city. This theory held true in San Diego and Los Angeles as well as other centers of Chicano art and activism. At the end of the 1980s, Border Art Workshop/Taller

de Arte Fronterizo member Guillermo Gómez-Peña would draw upon this “borderization” phenomenon as a means to assert the U.S.-Mexico border within the U.S. interior. Muralism of the 1970s was the forerunner to this idea and, through its visual marking of urban territory, set the preconditions for the border to become portable. I will discuss portability in detail in Chapter Four, but for now, it is important to note that the actions of Chicano muralists laid the groundwork for this more sophisticated conceptualization of the U.S.-Mexico border.

Even though muralism was prevalent in Southern California, the genre was not the dominant form of artistic expression in all areas. San Francisco and the Bay Area witnessed sophisticated poster and graphic design, most notably in the work of Rupert García and Malaquias Montoya. Montoya’s work continued on the theme of comparing the U.S.-Mexico situation to Vietnam. His 1973 poster, *Chicano Vietnam* served to equate the ongoing struggle of Chicano nationalists with the seemingly endless military conflict in Vietnam. The rhetoric of the poster immediately recalled CCR pamphlets decrying the “Vietnam of Aztlan.”



Figure 2-2: Roberto Chávez, Mural for East Los Angeles College (1974, destroyed 1981). Image available online at <http://www.chicanostudies-elac.org/history2.html>

The majority of Chicano art could not be transferred to the museum in any con-



Figure 2-3: Malaquias Montoya, *Chicano Vietnam* (1973). Image online at <http://www.blog.ryanhay.es/land-bodies-under-occupation/>

ventional sense of the word. Bringing street posters, murals and interactive performances to the museum would prove problematic. As a response, Chicanos established their own institutions including the Centro Cultural (San Diego) and the Galería de la Raza (San Francisco). Chicano Art laid claim to the street and attempted to engage with the public and the surrounding communities. Poster artists such as Montoya drew on the “high art” poster traditions of early 1970s Cuba, but their subject matter related directly to the political rhetoric of Chicano activism. Muralists including Torres, Ochoa, Judy Baca and the *Mujeres Muralistas* claimed a lineage tracing back to the *Tres Grandes*. In subject matter, though, they depicted the struggles of farm workers, women, and the “original” Mexican-Americans created by the 1848 boundary.

Central to the movement’s beliefs was the importance of the collective. Mirroring the Chicano movement’s emphasis on community, the art collective was a means to bring disparate interests together into a multi-voiced single group. The impulse to form collectives was not limited to the Chicano Movement, for the 1960s had witnessed the formation

of several important groups such as Fluxus, Archigram, and the Situationists. For the Chicanos, however, the collective symbolized the community and was itself a means of fighting for social change.

Perhaps the most visible of the Chicano art collectives was the Royal Chicano Air Force (RCAF). Founded in 1969 by artists including José Montoya, Esteban Villa, Juanishi V. Orosco, Ricardo Favela, and Rudy Cuellar, the group began as the Rebel Chicano Art Front. The collective adopted the name Royal Chicano Air Force after the acronym RCAF was confused with the Royal Canadian Air Force. The joke at the time was that the United Farm Workers now had their own air force in the fight against agribusiness. The resulting name bridged another border, that between the United States and Canada, heralding a previously unexplored connection between the southern border and that to the north.³⁶ The RCAF worked towards expressing the goals of the Chicano Movement as well as the UFW.³⁷

The Sacramento-based RCAF, while invited to create murals in San Diego's Chicano Park in the mid-1970s, began as a poster-making collective. Early Chicano poster art "was marked by a totally noncommercial, community-oriented character in the attitudes and expectations of the individuals and groups who made posters, the purposes they served, the audiences they addressed. . . ." in the words of art historian Shifra Goldman.³⁸ In the case of the RCAF in particular, poster-making served a two-pronged educational process. First, students from Sacramento State College [now University] were recruited to assist with the design and manufacture of posters. These students, usually Chicanos themselves, were educated about the history and mythology of the Chicano movement as well as the process of making public art. Secondly, the display of these posters in the primarily Mexican-American community served as a means of public education.³⁹

³⁶Because of its more liberal immigration policies, Canada became a temporary home for many Mexican-born artists working on the U.S.-Mexico border. For example, COFAC founder Luis Ituarte spent almost two decades working in Canada, even running for mayor of a small town. (Luis Ituarte, Interview with the author, February 9, 2009).

³⁷Royal Chicano Air Force Website. Accessed June 23, 2010: <http://www.chilipie.com/rcaf/>.

³⁸Shifra M. Goldman, *Dimensions of the Americas: Art and Social Change in Latin America and the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 162.

³⁹Shifra Goldman calls this "an ingenious idea when one has little access to the publishing industry." (Goldman, *Dimensions of the Americas*, 169). Chicano manuscripts were frequently rejected from main-

The RCAF was male-dominated, reflecting the fact that gender politics were a prominent division in Chicanismo. All-female collectives, however, became extremely powerful in the art community. The *Mujeres Muralistas* of the San Francisco area, founded in 1974 by Graciela Carrillo, Irene Pérez, and Patricia Rodríguez, were engaged in public mural commissions through 1976.⁴⁰ Chicanas struggled not only for Chicano rights, but also for the specific role of women. According to artist Amalia Mesa-Baines, this struggle entailed “renegotiating domestic and community roles through migration, education and societal interaction.”⁴¹ The *Mujeres Muralistas*’ first mural, *Latinoamerica* (1974), presented a pan-Latina vision of the world. The piece combined Peruvian, Venezuelan, Mexican, Guatemalan, and Bolivian cultures, as well as depictions of rural and urban settings.⁴²



Figure 2-4: Mujeres Muralistas, *Latinoamerica* (1974, destroyed). Image from Maria Ochoa, *Creative Collectives: Chicana Painters Working in Community* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2003).

The colors of the mural were primarily vibrant greens and reds with white accents,

stream, English-language publishing houses throughout the 1960s, 70s and 80s. Independent publishers such as San Diego’s Calaca Press stepped in to fill the void, offering bilingual writers a chance to publish original, untranslated versions of their work. For more on Calaca Press, visit www.calacapress.com.

⁴⁰Goldman, *Dimensions of the Americas* (1994), 212-213.

⁴¹Amalia Mesa-Bains, “El Mundo Feminino: Chicana Artists of the Movement – A Commentary on Development and Production.” *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-1985*, eds. Richard Griswold del Castillo, Teresa McKenna and Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano (Los Angeles: Wight Art Gallery, 1991), 131.

⁴²Maria Ochoa, *Creative Collectives: Chicana Painters Working in Community* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), 48. A complete description of *Latinoamerica* can be found in Ochoa’s text, along with color images. The mural no longer exists today, and photographs of it are exceedingly rare.

evoking the colors of the Mexican flag. Female figures played a primary role, reflecting the artists' personal preference as well as the role of women leaders. Throughout the mural there existed an emphasis on facial features and expressions, especially the eyes. *Latinoamerica*, aside from being one of the first large mural commissions by an all-female collective, adhered closely to Chicano themes. Located on San Francisco's Mission Street, it made no mention of the border or even immigration policy, but the images showcased the cultural diversity of Latin America. Whether a statement of pan-Latino pride or a commentary on the status of women, the mural marked an opening of Chicano art to previously unrecognized artists.



Figure 2-5: Detail from *Latinoamerica* (1974). Image from Maria Ochoa, *Creative Collectives: Chicana Painters Working in Community* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2003).

Gloria Anzaldúa, the Chicana feminist writer introduced in the previous chapter, analyzed the situation of women in Latin America, especially Chicanas, using the trope of the “new mestiza.” According to Anzaldúa, the new mestiza “puts history through a

sieve...looks at the forces that we as a race, as women, have been a part of.”⁴³ It is important to note that this change is catalyzed by a woman (as in Orozco’s *Cortes y La Malinche*, seen in Chapter 1), for the new mestiza rewrites history along the lines of gender as well as race. Claudia Sadowski-Smith claims that Anzaldúa “made the border the new foundational metaphor of Chicana/o studies.”⁴⁴ In doing so, Anzaldúa brought together the border and Chicanismo under the umbrella of mestizaje, a necessary condition of being a border dweller.

Through her position, physically located in the borderlands⁴⁵ and on the border itself, the Chicana/mestiza can harness the power of conflicting discourses of ethnicity, class, linguistics, gender and sexual orientation and use them to generate new meaning. Anzaldúa attributes this power to Vasconcelos’ theory of mestizaje, where “the mixture of races, rather than resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool,” laying the foundations for intellectual advancement.⁴⁶ In this manner, the new mestiza

...reinterprets history and, using new symbols, she shapes new myths. She adopts new perspectives toward the darkskinned, women and queers. She strengthens her tolerance (and intolerance) for ambiguity...she learns to transform the small ‘I’ into the total self.⁴⁷

In her formulation, Chicanos must embrace the essentialism of the border and a personal identity as a border dweller; a mestizo/a, would allow an intimate knowledge of the border and its conditions. As I will address in the following two chapters, this precondition would become less and less necessary with the opening up of the border beyond the physical.

Writing in the 1980s, Anzaldúa had the benefit of temporal distance from the 1970s political situation. At the time, San Diego proved to be both a dynamic center for Chicano art and a laboratory for experimenting with ideas about art and social change. I would

⁴³Anzaldúa, *Borderlands=La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), 104.

⁴⁴Sadowski-Smith, “Twenty-First Century Chicana/o Border Writing” (2006), 721.

⁴⁵Anzaldúa herself was a native of the border region who relocated to begin her career in San Francisco.

⁴⁶Anzaldúa, *Borderlands=La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), 99.

⁴⁷Ibid, 104-105.

argue that in the case of San Diego, art production and the development of a visual language took a back seat to the more broad ranging notions of art as a political tool. Art and politics were completely intertwined in the history of the city's Centro Cultural de la Raza. Founded in 1970 by Salvador Torres, Alurista, Guillermo Aranda, Herminia Enrique, Victor Ochoa, and Mario Torero Acevedo, the "Centro" was dedicated to "understanding, producing, and promoting the Mexican, Indian and Chicano arts and crafts native to this border region."⁴⁸ Thus even in the Centro's founding document, it is evident that the position of Chicanos was conceived of in relation to the border. Located in downtown Balboa Park, the Centro occupied a prominent position within San Diego and became the point of contact with the general (non-Chicano) public. Art exhibitions, folkloric dance performances and community classes were offered on a nearly continuous basis.⁴⁹ Because of its prominence and the activities of its board, the Centro soon grew to become the main funding organization for Chicano (and later border) art. Because of the flow of financial support, the politics of the Centro dominated the public view of Chicano art.⁵⁰

Chicano artists were often constrained by their audience as well as by the Centro's commitment to Chicanismo. Chicano art was so dependent on the community for reception that any attempt to push the boundaries would be met with a mixture of shock and derision. In the case of the Centro's exterior, a particular mural depicting a skeleton⁵¹ came under attack by the mostly-Anglo public in 1977. The mural, located on a water tank outside the Centro, was the subject of petitions protesting "that the mural was not beautiful nor did it

⁴⁸Centro Cultural de la Raza Statement of Purpose. Archives of the Centro Cultural de la Raza, University of California Santa Barbara Box 54, Folder 8.

⁴⁹The Centro Cultural de la Raza operated without interruption until May of 2000, when San Diego Chicanos organized a strike against the institution. The Chicanos, organized as the "Save Our Centro Coalition" (SOCC), demanded greater transparency in the Centro's dealings, as well as more open representation on the board of directors. The Centro continued to provide programming without the endorsement of Chicano leaders for seven years, after which a resolution was reached (May 8, 2007). The reasons and politics for the strike are beyond the scope of this dissertation, but more information on the subject can be found at the Centro Cultural archives at the University of California Santa Barbara.

⁵⁰For example, the muralist collective *Toltecas en Aztlán* was supported primarily by the Centro, and as a result reiterated the politics of Chicanismo. The group's pieces included many of the 1970s murals in Chicano Park.

⁵¹Skeletons are common symbols in Mexico, as seen in the imagery surrounding *el Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) and in the prints of the artist Guadalupe Posada. The skeleton on the Centro mural was an attempt to recall this particular Mexican artistic tradition. Because of the Centro's location in Balboa Park (downtown San Diego), the murals were viewed by many people unfamiliar with Mexican and Chicano imagery. The point of the skeleton would have been lost on them.

provide a proper influence for the young people in the area.”⁵² The skeleton was painted over that same year. In this manner, mural art, in prominent locations, can be considered a collaboration between the individual artists and the general public.



Figure 2-6: View of the exterior of the Centro Cultural de la Raza, San Diego (2010). The mural shown here depicts a skeleton costume instead. While this is not the mural that would have replaced the controversial image, it is representative of the type of work that is allowed on the façade. Image courtesy of the author.

In San Diego, the best-known collaboration between the general community and Chicano artists was the founding of Chicano Park and the painting of its mural program. Described at the beginning of this chapter, the park’s founding was a textbook example of community solidarity in the face of outside opposing forces. Immediately after the city government gave in to the demands of Barrio Logan’s residents, artists and the public alike began painting on the concrete pillars supporting the bridge. Over three hundred people contributed to the first, impromptu mural that commemorated the park.⁵³ There was no cohesive visual program, but rather a spontaneous outpouring of graffiti, splashes of vibrant color, and sketches.

Only after three years did the first planned murals appear in Chicano Park. Artist Salvador “Queso” Torres took charge of the program, devising a series of murals that would

⁵²George Ramos, “Better Images Sought by Cultural Center” *San Diego Union Tribune*, June 7, 1977. From the Centro Cultural de la Raza Archives, University of California Santa Barbara.

⁵³*Chicano Park* (1989, film).

extend “all the way to the bay,” as stated the popular slogan of the time.⁵⁴ The significance of the slogan is that it represented the Chicano struggle to take back their neighborhood from city developers. The Coronado Bay Bridge had, since 1969, cut a swath of industrial territory through the barrio. Attempting to reclaim the park, “all the way to the bay” was a means to reunite the neighborhood.

Community interaction and mural planning were subjugated to the constraints of the physical location. Chicano park developers were charged with the task of creating a suitable public space out of a bridge underpass. The park was to be situated underneath the Coronado Bay Bridge at the junction between that bridge and Interstate 5. The on- and off-ramps and the highway, as well as the bridge, are all elevated above the Barrio Logan neighborhood. This junction resulted in a space that was at once outdoors yet covered, natural and industrial, with pillars and scissions the defining architectural features. Logan residents compared the park space to a number of precedents, including a forest of concrete and a cathedral nave.⁵⁵ Artists and community members focused on mural painting to bring a warmth and vitality to the space, which was otherwise cold and alien.

The first official Chicano Park mural was a collaboration between artists and non-artists, an attempt at collective mural-making. Mural painting, a symbol of the Chicano movement, would become fully developed in southern California during the early 1970s. Many of the artists involved had little to no experience with mural composition and technical considerations.⁵⁶ That first mural, entitled *Quetzalcoatl*, betrayed the relative unfamiliarity with the genre. Painted by Salvador Torres and others on top of the spontaneous mural from the early days of Chicano Park, *Quetzalcoatl* maintained as much of the original graffiti as possible. In the composition, Quetzalcoatl, the mythical feathered serpent of Mexican mythology, appears before the Coronado Bridge surrounded by symbols. These symbols include a rose (Catholicism and the Virgin of Guadalupe in particular), yin-yang (Chinese mysticism), the United Farm Workers’ eagle, and a curved swastika (symbolizing

⁵⁴Ibid. This mural program was never completed; to this day, Chicano Park ends more than a block from the water, despite occasional efforts to extend its domain to the bay.

⁵⁵Cockroft, “The Story of Chicano Park” (1984), 84.

⁵⁶For a thorough analysis of the technical skills needed to create the Chicano Park Murals, see Eva Cockroft’s “The Story of Chicano Park” (1984).

transformation). In this early mural, symbolism became a shorthand for expressing the complex history of Chicanismo, *mestizaje*, and ultimately, the border.



Figure 2-7: Salvador “Queso” Torres and others, *Quetzalcoatl* (1973, renovated 1980s). Image from www.chicanoparksandiego.com

Quetzalcoatl, while an earnest attempt to capture the Chicano zeitgeist, failed to provide a coherent composition. The figure of the serpent, similar in color to the background, is not easily readable, and the jumble of symbols indicates no clear message. Eva Cockroft places early Chicano murals such as *Quetzalcoatl* in a category of their own, calling them “graffiti-murals.” This term indicates a “transitional stage between the ornamental Chicano graffiti writing, the individualized ‘placas’ characteristic of each gang or neighborhood, and a developed mural.”⁵⁷ To further complicate matters, at the time, the symbolic program of the Chicano movement (the mestizo head and eagle, among others) was not well known in the general Mexican-American community. Most Anglo outsiders would have had no exposure to the nascent Chicano visual language.

This fact raises the question of how the Chicano park murals were meant to be understood not only by their intended audience, but also by the general public. By utilizing an array of symbols, Chicano artists, especially Torres, attempted to inculcate the Mexican-American community in a particular visual shorthand. A few rudimentary images could, in theory, invoke a seemingly glorious Mexican (and especially indigenous) past, a history long since buried under centuries of conquest and colonialism. Artists emphasized and even exaggerated the accomplishments of Mexican and indigenous history in order to instill a sense of pride in the community. The Chicano Park Murals were in this spirit, and would

⁵⁷Cockroft, “The Story of Chicano Park” (1984), 89.

serve to educate the Barrio Logan residents in their shared heritage, codifying history in the process.

What, then, was the responsibility of the Chicano Park artists to the Anglo public, the African-American community, or the large Asian population in San Diego? The murals, especially heavily symbolic ones like *Quetzalcoatl*, not only employed symbolic language closed to outsiders, but also visual forms, colors and composition that proclaimed an aggressive identity politics. There is no set of statistics on the reception of the murals (and Chicano Park) by non-Chicanos, but it is probable that the attempt to defend and consolidate the Chicano community came at the exclusion of other segments of San Diego society. In the 1970s, this aggressive stance was commonplace, a holdover from the more militant civil rights and protest movements of the 1960s. The result, however, is a park that, while celebrating the history of one particular community, ended up emphasizing its separation from the city as a whole. It could even be said that Chicano Park reproduced the U.S.-Mexico border between Barrio Logan and San Diego.

Rather than focusing on the purely symbolic, other Chicano and Chicana artists sought to memorialize Mexican and Mexican-American history with their murals. According to artist Victor Ochoa, education was of primary importance for the Chicano movement, for most Mexicans living in the United States were taught little or nothing of their history. The Chicano Park *Historical Mural* of 1973 was designed and painted by the group *Toltecas en Aztlán*. The collective consisted of Guillermo Aranda, Arturo Román, Salvador Barajas, José Cervantes, Sammy and Bebé Llamas, Victor Ochoa, Ernest Paul, Guillermo Rosete, Guilbert "Magu" Luján and the M.E.Ch.A. (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán/Chicano Student Movement of Aztlán) group from the University of California Irvine. The bust-length portraits on the mural included Mexican Independence leaders Miguel Hidalgo and José María Morelos, and revolutionary heroes Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa. Che Guevara and César Chávez occupied prominent positions as well. David Alfaro Siqueiros, Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, Picasso, and Pablo O'Higgins⁵⁸ are

⁵⁸Pablo Esteban O'Higgins (1904-1983) was a Mexican-American student of Diego Rivera who went on to found the Taller de Gráfica Popular (People's Graphic Workshop) in Mexico in 1937. He was known for his mural painting, which emphasized the politics of socialism.

presented for their roles in revolutionizing modern and contemporary art. These portraits were all displayed as straightforwardly as possible, a depiction of the new Chicano canon presented without commentary or irony. This decision underscores the educational intent of the mural, but also leaves the portraits open to interpretation. For example, the lack of female portraits could indicate a relative indifference to the contributions of women. On the other hand, it could reflect a deeper failure of education, ignorance on the male artists' parts of such contributions. Such questions are left unanswered, the omissions rectified in later artworks.



Figure 2-8: Toltecas en Aztlán, *Historical Mural*. Chicano Park (1973). Image from www.chicanoparksandiego.com

The notable absence of female historical figures from *Historical Mural* was symptomatic of the Chicano attitude towards women. Female bodies do appear on the early Chicano Park Murals, but only as allegorical figures (*Birth of La Raza*; *Woman with Flag*). Chicana artist Yolanda M. López attempted to rectify this discrepancy later in the decade in a mural depicting the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo along with *los tres grandes*. López' mural placed a bust-length portrait of Kahlo in the forefront, with the male muralists positioned behind her. When viewed through a twenty-first century lens, the mural reflects Kahlo's increased standing in popular culture and scholarship.

Women were also given a prominent position on the 1977 mural *¡Barrio Si, Yonkes No!* depicting the Barrio Logan struggle against zoning laws. The phrase translates to

“Neighborhood Yes, Junkyards No,” the rallying cry for the residents of Barrio Logan. The community rose again to defend itself from the city of San Diego in response to a proposal to allow junkyards in the barrio. The slogan “Varrío Si, Yonkes No” is a play on the pronunciation of “Barrio” with a “v” substituting for the “B.” This wordplay is indicative of Chicano Spanish in general, which combines elements of Mexican Spanish, English, and the Pachuco dialect among others. The decision to leave out the accent on the word “Sí” also plays into this linguistic territory. In the mural, painted by a group of male artists including Victor Ochoa, generic community members hold up signs of protest under the painted slogan. Women are included among the protesters, and in fact given prominence, for they were considered to be the heart of the neighborhood. The images of female protesters were intended to invoke the mothers, wives and sisters of the Chicano movement, rather than memorialize any particular female leaders. The exclusionary attitude toward women would reappear in U.S.-Mexico border art, and will be discussed more fully in Chapter Three.

The founding of Chicano Park and the painting of its murals marked a high water mark for the Chicano Movement in San Diego. Subsequent battles with the city over zoning issues drained the activists’ energy. By the 1980s, Barrio Logan had ceased to be a self-sustaining community, only regaining its former vitality on the anniversary of Chicano Park each April. The role of art in the story of Chicano Park is a complicated one; it is difficult to assess or quantify the impact of a given mural on the attitude of the public. It remains true, however, that the perception of Barrio Logan by those outside the community was affected dramatically by the murals at Chicano Park. The vibrant, colorful allegories of Mexican and Mexican-American history remain the primary means by which outsiders identify Barrio Logan and the Chicano movement.

Contrasted with San Diego’s stable forms of community activism, Chicano art in Los Angeles moved rapidly from earnest communal self-expression to broad-ranging conceptualism. Epitomized by the group *Asco* (a Spanish word meaning “nausea” and “disgust”), this work targeted the Anglo art world rather than the Chicano community. In this respect, *Asco*’s work came to define a contrasting approach to Chicanismo, and set a precedent for



Figure 2-9: Raul Jose Jacquez, Alvaro Millan, Victor Ochoa, Armando Rodriguez, *Varrío Si, Yonkes No!* Chicano Park, 1977. Image from www.chicanoparksandiego.com

the BAW/TAF, bringing conceptual art to the border region. Consisting of members Willie Herrón, Gronk, Patssi Valdez, and Hector Gamboa, Jr., Asco was dubbed “post-Chicano” by the art historian Rita González, bridging the gap between the Chicano Art Movement and more mainstream 1970s U.S. art. In the words of art historian Max Benavidez, Asco “helped to move Chicano muralism from a nationalist platform of self-glorification to a critical and expressive reinterpretation of community and society.”⁵⁹ It is reasonable to consider Asco’s work as something other than purely Chicano, as it moved beyond the basic tenets of Chicano nationalism. In a sense, however, this “post-Chicano” work also

⁵⁹Max Benavidez, *Gronk* (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press, 2007), 10.

extended Chicanismo.

By claiming their territory as a “third space,” Chicano activists identified a psychological space beyond conventional notions of the nation-state, race and ethnicity.⁶⁰ This space could be seen as the border zone, whether mental or physical. Asco took this action further, “tagging” the exterior of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) in a 1972 piece. The action was intended to protest the exclusion of “ethnic art” from the museum’s galleries.⁶¹ The graffiti-style markings, consisting of the artists’ names, were the site of conflict between the street and the institution, the high and the low. Gamboa documented the piece, entitled *Spray Paint LACMA*, in a series of photographs. In this sense, Asco linked Chicano muralism with the underground mentality of graffiti and street art and the documentary practices of conceptualism. This action would be repeated the following year with Chicano Park’s initial graffiti-mural, but not pitched to the art world. Asco, however, consciously chose the museum as their canvas, layering another narrative of Chicano artists’ exclusion from the institution. Tagging LACMA could also be construed as *signing* the museum in an act of authorship.

Asco recreated and mobilized the border within downtown Los Angeles. In the early 1970s, the group’s members literally brought muralism to life with their performance pieces *Stations of the Cross* (1971) and *Walking Mural* (1972). While *Stations of the Cross*, their first performance piece as a group, focused on Mexican-American deaths in Vietnam,⁶² *Walking Mural* was primarily a comment on the staleness of Chicano mural imagery and its “static inert nature.” Through the performance, Asco loosened the standard tropes of Chicanismo as well as those of the border region – and invigorated both. The 1972 performance critiqued the limited visual vocabulary and didactic social realism of mainstream Chicano art.⁶³ The piece consisted of Asco members dressed in elaborate costumes marching down

⁶⁰By “third space” I am referring to David Gutiérrez’ definition: the site where ethnic Mexicans attempted to mediate the profound sense of displacement and other stresses raised by their existence as members of a marginalized minority in a region long considered their ancestral homeland. From David G. Gutiérrez, “Migration, Emergent Ethnicity, and the ‘Third Space’: The Shifting Politics of Nationalism in Greater Mexico.” *The Journal of American History* 86 (1999): 481-517.

⁶¹Benavidez, *Gronk* (2007), 38.

⁶²A full account of *Stations of the Cross*, as well as an excellent analysis of Asco’s performance art in general, can be found in C. Ondine Chavoya’s “Orphans of Modernism: The Performance Art of Asco” in *Corpus Delecti: Performance art of the Americas*, ed. Coco Fusco (New York: Routledge, 2000).

⁶³Benavidez, *Gronk* (2007) 40-41.



Figure 2-10: Asco, *Spray Paint LACMA* (1972). Image available online at http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/phantom_sightings/

Whittier Boulevard in Los Angeles. Patssi Valdez dressed as the Virgin of Guadalupe (in black), Willie Herrón as a multifaced mural, and Gronk as a Christmas (X-mas) tree. The entire performance was filmed and documented by Harry Gamboa, Jr., who followed the piece while carrying a video camera. These mural “characters” were derived from Chicano stereotypes, tropes that were often seen on murals throughout Los Angeles. By bringing the concept of mural down from the wall and into the street, Asco added a third dimension of space, as well as the element of time. *Walking Mural* played with the idea of portability in a previously static form of art, as well as the portability of Chicano art through urban territory.

According to Chicano art historian Chon Noriega, “Asco’s performance broke with the naïve realism that undergirded cultural nationalism, with its search for the *real* Chicano and the *right* politics, and presented Chicano identity as performative.”⁶⁴ This statement requires further examination – Asco’s work opened up the idea of performative identity in Chicano art, emphasizing the artifice involved. No one is *born* a Chicano; instead, people of Mexican ancestry can assume the identity in the United States in order to express a set of political and social beliefs. The attributes of the Chicano are as much a performance as

⁶⁴Chon Noriega, “No Introduction,” *Urban Exile: The Collected Writings of Harry Gamboa, Jr.* (University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 10.



Figure 2-11: Asco, *Walking Mural* (1972). Image available at <http://liamelcher.tumblr.com/post/3631986889/so-this-group-asco-is-a-group-of-chicano-artists>

any “performance art.” Ultimately, by exposing the performativity inherent in Chicanismo, Asco recalled earlier manifestations of Mexican-American identity such as the pachuco.⁶⁵ In the late 1980s, artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña would combine these disparate visions of Mexican and Mexican-American culture into one figure with his performance piece *Border Brujo* (“Border Magician”). This piece, a “performance poem” and film which I will discuss more fully in chapter four, gave voice to each of these identities, embodied in Gómez-Peña’s shaman.

I would argue that works such as the *Brujo* derive explicitly from Asco’s explorations into Chicano identity and performativity. Gómez-Peña was very familiar with Asco’s work at the time he created the character. The Brujo speaks in verse of his origins, “I’m a child of border crisis/a product of a cultural cesarean/I was born between epochs & cul-

⁶⁵The most prominent of these identities would be the 1930s “characters” of the *Pachuco* and the *Pachuca*. The figure of the pachuco/a has played a significant role in Mexican-American self-perception since the 1930s, when the term first entered common use. Developing a subculture that included a separate Spanish dialect and style of dress (the “zoot suit”), the pachucos and their female counterparts, pachucas, lived in the southwestern United States. Marcos Sánchez-Tranquilino and John Tagg discuss the history and ramifications of the pachuco in “The Pachuco’s Flayed Hide: The Museum, Identity, and Buenas Garras.” From *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation*, eds. Richard Griswold del Castillo, Teresa McKenna and Yvonne Yarbrow-Bejarano (Los Angeles: Wight Art Gallery, 1991).



Figure 2-12: Gómez-Peña as the “Border Brujo” (Scene from the 1989 film directed by Isaac Artenstein). Image from Flickr.

tures/born from an infected wound/a howling wound/a flaming wound/for I am part of a new mankind/the 4th World, the migrant kind...”⁶⁶ Gómez-Peña drew liberally on Anzaldúa (“infected wound”) and Vasconcelos (“new mankind”); in this manner, the *Brujo* provided a synthesis of earlier border theorizations. The poem and the brujo character, mine the paradox of Chicanismo being both new and transformative (the cosmic race) and its origins in conquest, violence and (later) U.S. hegemony. Gómez-Peña also takes into account the transformative nature of Chicanismo and the chameleon-like characteristics of the border: “Mexicanos can become Chicanos/overnite/Chicanos become Hispanics/Anglosaxons become Sandinistas/& surfers turn into soldiers of fortune/here, fanatic Catholics become

⁶⁶Guillermo Gómez-Peña, “Border Brujo: A Performance Poem (from the series Documented/Undocumented),” *The Drama Review* 35 (1991): 52.

swingers/& evangelists go zen.”⁶⁷ At the border in general, and for Chicanos in particular, identity is a fluid, rather than fixed, construct.

Another performative identity inherent to Chicanismo was the *rasquache* perspective. Tomás Ybarra-Frausto defined this term, “rasquachismo” as the underdog mentality rooted in the Chicano vernacular.⁶⁸ In this manner, artists drew on the aesthetics of kitsch epitomized in velvet paintings and mass-produced religious icons. They also valorized the idea of reusing or repurposing materials in their artworks. The underdog position of the *rasquache* underlies the Chicano Park murals and the entire process of “winning” back Chicano Park from the government. *Rasquachismo* is necessarily a product of the border region, and as such must be analyzed in its context. The *rasquache* mentality pervaded Chicano and later border art, and would even find its way into twenty-first century works, including those of Taller Yonke in Nogales.⁶⁹ As artist and writer Amalia Mesa-Baines described, in *rasquachismo*, “the irreverent and spontaneous are employed to make the most from the least.”⁷⁰ It is clear from this description that *rasquachismo* is not simply far from a defeatist position, but in fact a way of winning against the odds.

It is important to note that the *rasquache* aesthetic is not simply kitsch or a reappropriation thereof. As Mesa-Baines contends, in art, *rasquachismo* became a “facet of internal exploration that acknowledges the meaning sedimented in popular culture and practices.”⁷¹ In other words, by viewing culture as an outsider, one can better understand its artifice – the fluid and performative nature of identity. It follows that *rasquachismo* (the outsider perspective) is a potential tool for dismantling the dominant narratives of identity, creating space for new histories to be written. This sensibility echoes the explicit goals of the Chicano movement, becoming an underlying force in most, if not all, of Chicano art. *Rasquache* Chicano art of the 1970s took on this perspective and delved more deeply into community

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸For a thorough discussion of *rasquachismo*, see Ybarra-Frausto’s “*Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility*,” in *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation*, eds. Richard Griswold del Castillo, Teresa McKenna and Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano (Los Angeles: Wight Art Gallery, 1991). The term is supposedly of Nahuatl origin, but entered popular usage with the artists and theorists of the Chicano movement.

⁶⁹Taller Yonke (Junk Studio) created super-sized sculptures out of found materials and scrap metal on the border fence at Nogales, Arizona.

⁷⁰Amalia Mesa-Baines, “‘Domesticana’: The Sensibility of Chicana *Rasquache*.” *Aztlán* 24 (1999): 157.

⁷¹Ibid, 158.

interaction, attacking and reconsidering the art establishment from this underdog position. Asco, and later the 1980s BAW/TAF, brought the sensibility of rasquachismo to conceptual and performance art. By attacking the museum as a bastion of white privilege, Asco engaged in the discourse of institutional critique. Their choice of graffiti to do so, however, evoked Chicano gang tags. Through *Spray Paint LACMA* and other pieces, Asco insisted on a rasquache approach – the wily underdog posing a significant threat to the existing social order. As I will discuss in Chapter 3, the BAW/TAF created an entire aesthetic (spray painted foam costumes, wooden cutout ships) for their *End of the Line* performance that recalled rasquachismo’s tendency to reuse materials. Later BAW/TAF works such as the intervention in Maclovio Rojas (Chapter 3) would make this connection explicit, emphasizing the repurposed aesthetics of the *poblado* (land squat), in which entire houses were constructed from abandoned garage doors.

In acknowledging that Chicanismo is performative, Asco undermined the self-important and monolithic Chicano identity in favor of presenting that identity as fluid. This idea would become key to later theorizations of the U.S.-Mexico border. With the act of crossing, one’s identity shifts – from “citizen” to “immigrant” and back again. Borders are often discussed in terms of porousness, as I have mentioned in Chapter One, with scholars drawing attention to the gaps in the line rather than its solidity. Later artists, including members of the BAW/TAF in the 1980s and Guillermo Gómez-Peña in the 1990s, used performance art to investigate these gaps and related concepts against the backdrop of U.S.-Mexico politics, labor issues, and immigration policy. By representing identity as performative, Asco not only commented on the status of the Chicano movement, but in fact laid the groundwork for a more sophisticated conceptualization of the borderlands, informing the 1980s work of the BAW/TAF.

By the beginning of the 1980s, some Chicano artists had begun to shift their focus from identity politics and nationalism to internationalism and the U.S.-Mexico border. With the election of President Ronald Reagan in 1980, Mexican immigration would once again occupy mainstream U.S. attention. Although the U.S. Border Patrol was officially established in 1924 with the Labor Appropriation Act, the Reagan administration expanded

and militarized the department. The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) placed the Border Patrol under the purview of the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS), which had been established in 1933, and provided further measures for the capture, detainment, and deportation of illegal immigrants.

In San Diego, Chicano artists including Victor Ochoa, David Avalos and Michael Schnorr began to collaborate with others, including Mexican artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña and his then-wife, Sara Jo Berman, and filmmakers Isaac Artenstein and Jude Eberhard. This group became the first iteration of the BAW/TAF, the first binational art collective focused solely on the U.S.-Mexico border. It is important to note that even though Ochoa, Avalos and Schnorr worked previously in the Chicano tradition, their involvement with the BAW/TAF was an attempt to break completely with that earlier mode of artistic production. In this way, the BAW/TAF was both an evolution from Chicanismo and break with its particular politics.

Chicano activism of the BAW/TAF would therefore translate directly into art dealing primarily with the U.S.-Mexico border region. The significance of the community and the presence of art “on the streets” became extremely important for the fledgling BAW/TAF collective, and were prevalent throughout their 1980s works. The BAW/TAF will be discussed more fully in Chapter Three, which deals with their approach to the border and, more specifically, to the problematic of site. Chicano murals exhibited another kind of site-specificity, for these pieces could not be removed or displayed elsewhere without tremendous effort and technical skill. The site-specificity in question here, however, was not limited to issues of physical location. The “site” in border art is, epistemically, the border; with Chicano art, “site” referred to something mythical, usually the concept of Aztlán. Here, the border, or space of intercultural contact, becomes mythologized through the folklore of a specific ethnic group. This concept is different from the “portable border” (Ch. 4), which can be experienced by anyone regardless of race, ethnicity or nationality. Thus, Asco, muralism and Chicano art in general developed a prototype of the portable border, while retaining an essentialist component.

In other cases, such as Chicano Park, the previously mythical site became tangible

– Aztlán located under the Coronado Bay Bridge. This re-envisioning of the Chicano homeland for the local setting also operates in a different manner than the portable border. Chicanos re-made the neighborhood into a vision of Aztlán to incarnate an imagined past. While drawing on a purportedly mythical site, one that had become part of the community’s folklore during the movement, Chicano artists still clung to a notion of exclusivity. Chicano art was primarily for Chicano activists and the Mexican-American population in general. The later works of the BAW/TAF in the 1980s – and eventually Gómez-Peña’s and Schnorr’s explorations with “portability” in the 1990s – would open the border beyond these national and ethnic communities, at the same time relying on the physical border for meaning. The ultimate goal of rendering the border portable was to make everyone a potential border-dweller. In the 1970s the Chicano movement’s primary concerns – immigration, political mobilization, minority rights – were far too immediate to encourage abstract conceptions of “border.” In 1970, the U.S.-Mexico border was far too physical to be dematerialized.

The significance of this transitional period lies primarily in how the ideas of the Chicano movement were transformed into broader strategies to address the border region. As stated earlier, Chicano politics were not clearly aligned with those of Mexico or even Mexican immigrants in the United States; it was and is common for second or third generation Mexican-Americans to feel little solidarity with those who had recently arrived. But immigration was the issue that also tied Chicano activism to the fate of Mexican migrants, people without rights or a united voice. Through the concept of the mestizo, the border could be connected to Chicanismo and the concerns of Mexicans living or working in the United States. The tension between internationalism and Chicano nationalism proved to be productive for artists on both sides. On the one hand, Chicano artists emphasized Aztlán and its connection to the Mexican and Mexican-American people, at the same time, artists were placed in a position to erase borders, whether tangible or imagined, between different populations. In doing so, Chicano art began to address the inequalities and discrepancies of the border. Through art, artists attacked the system that had ensured the continuation of those very conditions.

Chapter 3

The Conceptual Border

“I loved the fact that to me, it was like a little laboratory. A laboratory of what the community, the whole society was.” – Victor Ochoa, 2010

“We really focused on the border as a site of possibilities, as a spiral model as opposed to a dividing line and with the whole idea of the artist as a social thinker, as a binational diplomat, as an alternative chronicler.” – Guillermo Gómez-Peña, 2009

These two reminiscences, from two very different artists, encapsulate the ethos behind the Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo (BAW/TAF). Victor Ochoa, a Chicano muralist who had lived in Los Angeles, San Diego and Tijuana, and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, a Mexican-born performance artist who had studied at California Institute of the Arts, were both among the founding members of the group. The idea of an art collective as “laboratory” was not limited to Ochoa; other group members were dedicated to experimenting with and addressing the problems of the U.S.-Mexico border through art. Gómez-Peña’s conception of the border as a “spiral,” on the other hand, suggests another method of conceptualizing the border line, one which goes back to Vasconcelos.¹ Although they and the other founders all came from various backgrounds, as a collective, they became the first group to

¹With a spiral, one is never sure of his or her position, whether he or she is actually in Mexico or the United States. BAW/TAF founder David Avalos would later go to complicate this spiral with his visualization of the border as Möbius strip. Whereas the spiral’s sides are in constant overlap, the Möbius strip has only one side.

focus primarily on the U.S.-Mexico border, using their “laboratory” to generate new ideas about site-specificity, broad internationalism and socio-politically engaged art.

Even the collective’s name popularized the idea of “border art” as a distinct category. The choice of a bilingual and somewhat unwieldy title for the group echoed the nature of the border region, which is often described in terms of linguistic and cultural hybridity.² Formed in 1984, it was intentionally binational and comprised of a constantly changing roster of Chicano, Mexican and Anglo-American artists that collectively defined border art through their practice. Performance became their medium of choice, but the BAW/TAF often combined these works with multimedia installations. Original members included Chicano artists David Avalos and Victor Ochoa, Anglo-American artist Michael Schnorr, Jewish-American filmmakers Jude Eberhard and Isaac Artenstein, and Mexican-born artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña and his American wife, Sara-Jo Berman. This original slate of artists only lasted for three years, and the BAW/TAF roster changed continually throughout the group’s existence. Schnorr provided core continuity, and together with Japanese-American artist Susan Yamagata, remains the archivist of the group. The first artists to link performance, site-specificity, and the U.S.-Mexico border, the BAW/TAF was also the first to export “border art” to other geographic locations and situations. The exportation of the border to other regions paved the way for the concept of the portable border (Ch. 4).

During what I term the “late” period (post-1992), the BAW/TAF espoused an ethos of traveling borders, transporting “border art” to other regions. Although not previously periodized in this manner, the works of the BAW/TAF can be divided roughly into three phases. The early period, from the group’s founding in 1984 through the arrival of Felipe Ehrenberg in 1986, was a time of dramatic splitting from the Chicano movement in San Diego. From 1986 through 1992, the BAW/TAF experienced a middle period marked by

²For a thorough understanding of the social, linguistic and cultural hybridity of the U.S.-Mexico border region (and U.S.-Latin American exchanges in general), see Oscar J. Martínez, *Border People: Life and Society in the US-Mexico Borderlands* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994); Daniel D. Arreola and James R. Curtis, *The U.S.-Mexico Border Cities: Landscape Anatomy and Place Personality* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993); and Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, Trans. Christopher L. Chiappari and Silvia L. López (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

shifts in the group's composition. The collective embarked on a series of performances and installations that were influenced by European conceptualism, which Ehrenberg had brought to their attention.

The BAW/TAF promoted the values of multiculturalism and shared history over militancy and nationalism. Although founded on the principles of the Chicano movement, the group, by nature of its composition and political outlook, opened border art beyond the limitations of Chicanismo. In the 1970s, Chicano art had been defined in terms of Mexican-American activism, focusing on indigenous heritage and their political struggle in the North.³ Emerging from this model, border art had to address the audience and needs of Chicano art but at the same time, expand in scope further than the movement had originally conceived. This openness was ostensibly constructed in terms of viewing the border from a multitude of perspectives and embracing global conceptualism.

Throughout the 1980s, the BAW/TAF struggled to negotiate between a regionally dictated border essentialism and the broad internationalism its members claimed.⁴ Along these lines, the BAW/TAF emphasized the backgrounds of its individual members (Anglo-American, Chicano, Mexican, Jewish-American) as contributing to this open perspective. The identity politics of the border complicate the matter, especially in terms of nationality, ethnic background and regional affiliation. For example, would Gómez-Peña, originally from Mexico City, be able to access the same border identity as San Diego-born Schnorr or Chicano activist Avalos? Or was the perspective of a native border-dweller somehow more authentic? This very debate was one of the reasons Gómez-Peña began, after leaving the BAW/TAF, to focus on the border as a metaphor rather than a physical site, subsequently laying the foundation for the portable border.

Aside from the debates surrounding identity and authenticity, the U.S.-Mexico border proved to be the BAW/TAF's delineating factor. According to Victor Ochoa, "what tied

³See Isidro Ortíz, "¡Sí, Se Puede! Chicana/o Activism in San Diego at Century's End," in *Chicano San Diego*, ed. Richard Griswold del Castillo (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007).

⁴These ideas are not in complete conflict on the border – the essentialism of the border (having access to the specialized knowledge of the border dweller) is itself a product of an international situation between the United States and Mexico. The BAW/TAF mediated between its access to the local situation (through the experiences and the *bodies* of Schnorr, Avalos and Ochoa) and its ties to the international art world and social movements in other places, such as Los Angeles (Hicks) and Mexico City (Gómez-Peña).

us together was that whole issue of the border. We all lived within the confines of this border. And that was reminiscent of the Chicano movement that brought us together.”⁵ It is important to note that for Ochoa, the physical reality of the U.S.-Mexico border proved dominant.⁶ But if this border was a site for new identities, it was also contentious. Founder David Avalos viewed the BAW/TAF as an antidote to far-fetched conceptions of intercultural dialogue and harmonious coexistence:

... while some may have espoused a border utopia, I couldn't imagine getting beyond the contentiousness of the border, the conflict, and the need for people to organize and assert themselves in the face of systemic social inequity, political inequity, economic inequity and exploitation.⁷

These two attitudes toward the border exemplify the productive tension that defined the BAW/TAF, tension born of two different ways of thinking about the U.S.-Mexico situation. On the one hand, the collective conceived of the border as a multicultural laboratory, a place to carry out progressive, utopian social experiments. In contrast to this vision, the other viewpoint held that the border is the site of failed experiments – experiments in social control and economic stratification. How, then, was the BAW/TAF to reconcile the two points of view?

In fact, that underlying tension was never resolved. But although these contradictions contributed to the exit of several original members and the breakdown of collective practice within the group, I contend that the tension-ridden BAW/TAF nonetheless fundamentally changed the relationship between the art world and the U.S.-Mexico border. The group's insistence on the primacy of site articulated the goals and tenets of the Chicano Movement to a broader spectrum of society, rendering the border a highly charged and productive region for art making – while sowing the seeds for portability. Prior to the BAW/TAF, “border art” did not exist as a category in itself. As site played a greater role than identity politics, border art came into being.

⁵Victor Ochoa, Interview with the author. January 14, 2010.

⁶As a child, the artist had moved back and forth between Los Angeles and Tijuana, his parents caught up in Operation Wetback. (From Ochoa, Interview with the author, 2010).

⁷David Avalos, Interview with the author. April 25, 2010.

Through their insistence on the importance of site and site-specificity, BAW/TAF artists redefined the border. Only when the border had achieved status as a solid physical entity – a participant in the production of art – could it then become portable and metaphorical. This paradox, that the assertion of site should make the border portable, is the means to understanding the relationship of physical and metaphorical site. The border could not become portable until it was first addressed as a physical phenomenon. Only then could it be internalized into the bodies of those who represent the border to a mainstream audience.

A product of 1980s activist art, the BAW/TAF drew on the tactics of other well-known collectives, Asco and Fluxus⁸ being key examples. Beyond the art world, BAW/TAF members also cited the contributions of Chicano political leaders as inspiration. Mexican-born Guillermo Gómez-Peña summarized the group's artistic and political influences:

We have the Chicano Committee on Civil Rights, organized by Herman Baca. . . the American Friends Service Committee and Roberto Martínez, working on defending the rights of migrant workers. They were our political avatars. But at the same time, we were also in dialogue with the Guerilla Girls, and with Gran Fury and Act Up. . . . So I think that the border model – the border way of working as an artist – implies the crossing of internal borders between multiple milieus and multiple contexts. . . especially those of academia, the media, activism, and the art world.⁹

According to Gómez-Peña, then, the BAW/TAF negotiated borders within the art world through its own practice. Although the collectives he cites, including Act Up and Gran Fury,

⁸Fluxus, the international art collective, was theorized by Lithuanian-born founder George Maciunas (in 1963-64), based upon the principles of “globalism, unity of art and life, intermedia, experimentalism, chance, playfulness, simplicity, implicativeness, exemplativism, specificity, presence in time and musicality.” Owen F. Smith, “Developing a Fluxable Forum: Early Performance and Publishing,” *The Fluxus Reader* (U.K.: Academy Editions, 1988). Maciunas had originally conceived of the group as a publishing venue for experimental projects, rather than a style of performance. As a result, Fluxus would have bridged the gap between art and publishing, an attempt by artists to control the means of distribution. Fluxus shows combined elements of performance art with music, finding common ground between the two. For example, Bob Watts' *Two Inches* (1962) consisted of a “score” which instructed the performers to stretch a two inch-wide ribbon across the stage and cut it. Dick Higgins' *Constellation No. 4* (1962) was more “musical,” instructing each performer to make a single sound on “any instrument available to him, including the voice.” See Smith's chapter of *The Fluxus Reader* as well as Ann-Marie Dumett, *Corporate Imaginations: The Fluxus Collective in the Age of Multinational Capitalism* (PhD Diss, Boston University, 2009).

⁹Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Interview with the author, San Francisco, CA, March 23, 2009.

did not officially form until the late 1980s (1987 and 1988, respectively), [the activist groups, their tactics, and the ideas behind them, had a profound and continuing influence on the BAW/TAF.](#)¹⁰ par/ Perhaps the most direct influence on the collective was a performance that took place in San Diego. [This first work of “border art” occurred in 1984, before the founding of the BAW/TAF. Mexican-born performance artist and poet Zopilote \(Manuel Mancillas\) put together a multimedia piece that encapsulated his vision of the border region.](#)

Incarnated Silhouettes, Siluetas Encarnadas. And it was both in Spanish [and] English, and I didn't translate. I wrote both Spanish and English parts, and I wrote it for 4 or 5 different voices. But since I couldn't get anyone else – I tried and tried – I did all the voices, and I played the music, and we had the dancers and slides, and then juxtaposing a play...¹¹

As Zopilote himself described, the piece was highly experimental although it never established a literal connection between the U.S.-Mexico border and artistic practice, it performed its “inbetween-ness.” The chaotic nature of the piece echoed the confusion of the border zone and inspired other artists to address the subject.

Chicano artist and activist David Avalos attended the *Incarnated Silhouettes* performance in 1984, around the time that he was selected to put together a show at San Francisco's Galería de la Raza.¹² Avalos originally had planned to bring established Chicano artists together to do a show about the U.S.-Mexico border, but he was deterred by the more commercial direction that mainstream Chicano art had taken by that point.¹³ Choosing instead to put together a multinational group with broader backgrounds than traditional Chicano artists, Avalos contacted muralist Victor Ochoa and Southwest College

¹⁰Schnorr and Gómez-Peña readily cite these collectives as influences, particularly [Act Up and Gran Fury, which, in the United States, helped to change the terms of the national conversation on HIV/AIDS. Schnorr recounted the BAW/TAF's interactions with Gran Fury during the 1992 Venice Biennale, in which both groups participated \(From Schnorr, Interview with the author, Chula Vista, CA, April 16, 2009, and Gómez-Peña, Interview with the author, 2009\).](#)

¹¹Manuel Mancillas (Zopilote), Interview with the author, Potrero, CA, April 15, 2009.

¹²Avalos, Interview with the author (2010). The show came about as a result of Avalos helping the Galería de la Raza's Rene Yañez with (bureaucratically) retrieving some U.S. artworks from a show in Tijuana. Yañez offered Avalos the opportunity to put together a show at the Galería in exchange for his assistance.

¹³By the early 1980s, in most cases Chicano art had become decoupled from its activist roots. Artists such as San Diego's muralist Salvador “Queso” Torres became affiliated with galleries, seeking more commercial venues to display their works. From Avalos, Interview with the author.

professor Michael Schnorr, who brought along filmmakers Isaac Artenstein and Jude Eberhard, Guillermo Gómez-Peña¹⁴ and Sara-Jo Berman. The resulting show, *Border Realities*, ran from February 23 through March 23 of 1984 and brought together artists working in different media (performance, film, mural painting, mixed-media installation) on a single issue: the U.S.-Mexico border.¹⁵ The group called themselves the Border Art Workshop, adding “Taller de Arte Fronterizo” – in echo of Zopilotes polyglot *Siluetas*, emphasizing the binational and bilingual nature of the collective.

Border Realities became the first in a series of installations in California that showcased the group’s different disciplinary approaches to border art. It is of significance that this very first show by the BAW/TAF took place in San Francisco – far from the actual border. At the time, San Francisco’s Galeria de la Raza was one of the most important and highly visible venues for Chicano artists to display their work. In 1984, the BAW/TAF consisted of more non-Chicanos than purely Chicano artists. The Galeria de la Raza curator Rene Yañez encouraged the multicultural group to come together to create an activist show. Avalos was given latitude to focus on a single highly politicized issue that affected more than just Chicanos, rather than the standard tropes of Chicanismo.¹⁶ Although the immigration debate had been in the national and local consciousness for over 130 years,¹⁷ *Border Realities* broke new ground in relating art to these issues.

The projects in *Border Realities* spanned a range of media and ideas. Ochoa, an accomplished muralist from the heyday of Chicano Park,¹⁸ contributed a 374 sq. ft. mural for the exterior of the Galería de la Raza. The images, a series of framed vignettes, evoked

¹⁴Gómez-Peña, originally from Mexico City, brought with him a different attitude toward the border than would a Mexican-born inhabitant of the northern states, or *Norteno*. He had been educated at California Institute of the Arts and expressed a more cosmopolitan outlook to the arts than did many of his BAW/TAF collaborators. By this, I mean that Gómez-Peña looked not only to the Chicano movement (and its nationalism) for inspiration, but also Mexico City, New York, and parts of Europe.

¹⁵Avalos, Interview with the author (2010). Also, “Listing Announcement for Galeria de la Raza, *Border Realities*,” from the Galeria de la Raza archive, Santa Barbara, CA.

¹⁶Aztlán and indigenous imagery.

¹⁷Immigration had been of great concern to the United States and Mexico since the establishment of the present-day border in 1848. On a national scale, immigration legislation, guest worker programs, and references in popular culture had occurred in cycles for over a century. See my discussion of the U.S.-Mexico border since 1848 in Chapter One.

¹⁸Ochoa was one of the original activists involved in the claiming of Chicano Park, he painted murals at the site starting in 1973.



Figure 3-1: Exterior of Galería de la Raza showing Ochoa's mural. Image from the Galería de la Raza archive, University of Santa Barbara.

the border region and served as an advertisement of the show for the community.¹⁹ The frames are placed against a cosmic backdrop, consisting of Earth in the foreground and a blue-tinged sun at one corner. A skeletal figure of Death holding a scythe emerges from North America. Ochoa's mural marked a departure from his earlier imagery in Chicano park; gone are the references to Mexican history and a shared indigenous past. At the same time, some degree of Chicano "cosmic unity" remains, although this unity is fragmented. This mural began a shift away from history and fantasy, to the reality evoked by the show's title.

Avalos' contribution, the *San Diego Donkey Cart Altar*, evoked the donkey carts of Tijuana. These carts are an inevitable part of the (Anglo) tourist experience and serve as an unofficial symbol of the city. By creating the *San Diego Donkey Cart*, Avalos invoked the similarities between San Diego and Tijuana, implying that these two cities are, in fact, one (Recalling the fluidity between art and activism in his Chicano past, Avalos would display this project two years later in front of the U.S. Courthouse in downtown San Diego with the

¹⁹ "Listing Announcement for Galería de la Raza, *Border Realities*," from the Galería de la Raza archive, Santa Barbara, CA.



Figure 3-2: BAW/TAF, *Border Realities* (1984). Installation view of Avalos' *San Diego Donkey Cart Altar*. Image from the Galería de la Raza archive, University of Santa Barbara.

slogan “¡Raza Si – Migra No!”²⁰ – The People Yes! – INS No! – painted on the frame).²¹

Signaling the presence of Aztlán in *Border Realities*, Gómez-Peña and his then-wife, dancer Sara-Jo Berman, contributed a performance titled with a Nahuatl word, *Ocnoceni*.²² The two artists performed as the group *Poyesis Genetica*, which they founded in 1981.²³ For *Ocnoceni*, a combination of dance and poetry set against a slideshow backdrop, Gómez-Peña and Berman explored initial themes that would continue throughout Gómez-Peña's career as a performance artist (and Berman's as a dancer). With this piece, Gómez-Peña solidified his particular brand of performance around cultural and linguistic mixtures, the use of poetry, and the exploration of archetypal figures in Mexican and U.S. history.²⁴

²⁰ Avalos' omission of the accent on the word “Sí” was intentional. Choosing to use or omit accents, whether in artists' and activists' names, proper nouns, or Spanish words, was a political statement on the part of Chicanos. Recall that the Chicano park mural “Varrío Si, Yonkes No!” also omitted the accent on “Sí.”

²¹ David Avalos “The San Diego Donkey Cart Reconsidered: Somewhere Between Disneyland and Tijuana” (2009), correspondence with the author, July 7, 2010.

²² A Nahuatl word meaning “geographic otherness.” From the *Border Realities* catalogue, Galería de la Raza, February 22, 1984 (Galería de la Raza Archive, Santa Barbara, CA).

²³ It is unclear whether Gómez-Peña and Berman intended the group's name as an oblique reference to Vasconcelos and the Cosmic Race, but the connection is undeniable.

²⁴ *Border Realities* catalogue, Galería de la Raza, February 22, 1984 (Galería de la Raza Archive, Santa Barbara, CA). The catalogue described the piece as “an avant-garde journey where traditional Mexican and Modern American, modern pachuco, and ancient Aztec, Latin and Western American objects both spiritual and material meet and come alive.”

Overall, *Border Realities* served to bring together the work of individuals along a common theme. Significantly, the BAW/TAF encouraged an exploration of the spaces between artistic media. Was the first *Border Realities*, then, an installation or a performance? Was the show a single, collaborative work or a collection of individual projects? The U.S.-Mexico border provided both a common theme and a purpose for the exhibition. David Avalos described the nature of *Border Realities*:

... when you look at the first project of the Border Art Workshop, the exhibition *Border Realities* at the Galería, you see a variety of approaches. You see Victor show up creating a mural there at the Galería, about immigration, about images of immigration. I had a smaller version of the [San Diego] donkey cart there, a donkey cart altar. There were other pieces related to the border, metaphorically.²⁵

This idea that art could be a means to communicate the reality of the border through a series of metaphors, was the first significant effort by the BAW/TAF to produce a border dialogue within the art world.

It is important to note that the BAW/TAF's border dialogue was initiated in San Francisco, a place in which Chicano thought had long been well received. In this city, more than five hundred miles from the U.S.-Mexico border, artists relied upon a combination of metaphor and familiarity to bring the border north, locating it in the Galería de la Raza. In actuality, however, the audience at the Galería, located in San Francisco's Mission District, would have been familiar with the issues and politics surrounding the U.S.-Mexico border. The Galería itself had been showing the work of Chicano and Latino artists since its founding in 1970. The BAW/TAF did attempt to bring the physical experience of the border north, including the day-to-day realities of crossing and contact that would not be so easily located in San Francisco.

Detached from the physical border, *Border Realities*' relationship to site was complicated. The issue began with the title: how to express the reality of the border far away from the physical line? Residents of Tijuana and San Diego dealt with the border on a

²⁵Avalos, Interview with the author (2010).

daily basis, from the immigrant workers commuting from Mexico each day, to the American tourists spending freely in the bars and shops of Tijuana's Avenida Revolución. Evoking the reality of the border to residents of the region is something that can be accomplished quickly with a few symbols, images, or phrases ("La Migra," the Border Patrol, cheap sombreros). To audiences outside the border region, however, how would this reality best be communicated? This outsider-insider dynamic was complicated by the experience of borders within other urban centers. Communities of Mexican immigrants in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and even Chicago had reproduced a version of the U.S.-Mexico border within a larger urban framework. The BAW/TAF's focus on "reality," as shown in the title, made the artists' intentions clear. *Border Realities* was not meant to evoke notions of intercultural contact, but instead to convey the experience of living on the international dividing line and carrying its marks within oneself.

Although the BAW/TAF experienced success with the *Border Realities* model of collaborative installation, the group also desired to create site-specific artworks for the San Diego-Tijuana community. Returning to the physical border zone, however, would require the BAW/TAF artists to engage a thorough re-envisioning of the nature of site. Since the minimalism of the 1960s, site had played a significant role in the contextualizing and interpretation of art. Initially, site-specific art "gave itself up to its environmental context, being formally determined or directed by it."²⁶ In 1970s works by conceptual artists Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Hans Haacke, however, the "physical condition of a specific location *recedes* as the primary element in the conception of site."²⁷ In these pieces, critical of museums in general, "site" referred to an entire institutional system rather than the specific location of the work. The BAW/TAF learned from this tradition, using site-specificity to critique not only a single location (the U.S.-Mexico border) but also the entire politico-economic apparatus it symbolized. In their late 1980s works, the BAW/TAF artists, especially Gómez-Peña, would also benefit from Robert Smithson's 1979 idea of the "non-site," which I will address in Chapter Four.

²⁶Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 11.

²⁷Kwon, *One Place After Another* (2002), 19. Emphasis mine.

Resolving the problems of site and site-specificity required the BAW/TAF to become more conceptual in their practice. The influence of Mexican artist Felipe Ehrenberg allowed for this development. In 1986, Ehrenberg came to the BAW/TAF for their *Café Urgente* project, a performance/symposium hybrid that brought academic discourse to the border situation. The first Mexican artist to align himself with international conceptualism during the 1960s,²⁸ Ehrenberg moved from Mexico to London after finding himself the target of government scrutiny following the Tlatelolco student massacre of 1968 and its accompanying crackdown on political expression. The image below is taken from his 1991 book *Codex Aeroscriptus Ehrenbergensis*. Ehrenberg overlaid boldly colored stencil images, including those of television screens,²⁹ shadowy male figures, palm trees, and a man brandishing a pistol.



Figure 3-3: Felipe Ehrenberg, pages from *Codex Aeroscriptus Ehrenbergensis* (paperback book, 1991). Image from the book.

The 1991 *Codex* was a culmination of visual and conceptual themes Ehrenberg had been addressing since his days in Mexico City and London. He titled the piece “codex,” referring to both the pre-Columbian and colonial histories of Latin America.³⁰ Ehren-

²⁸Fernando Llanos, “Welcome to Manchuria and its Peripheral Vision,” in *Manchuria: Visión Periférica: Felipe Ehrenberg 50 Años* (Mexico: Editorial Diamantina, 2007), 12.

²⁹The television screens in particular were taken from a 1972 work, *Screens*, in which he made one drawing of a TV screen per minute, for twenty-four minutes.

³⁰While the word “codex” refers to a type of book binding in common use, with separate pages bound together inside a cover, the term has a specific connotation within Latin American art. Pre-Columbian civilizations, such as the Maya and Aztecs, created codices out of tree bark and other fibers. Later, Spanish

berg's Codex is a complement to the few surviving pre-Columbian codices, including the eleventh-century Mayan-language *Dresden Codex*, which was used in the twentieth century to decipher Mayan hieroglyphics. Post-conquest codices depicted ways of life – ceremonies, rituals and other details intended to document the interactions between European and indigenous cultures. Others, such as the late-16th century *Aubin Codex*, present an account of the conquest from the indigenous perspective.³¹

Ehrenberg had long been fascinated with the idea of pre-Columbian codices and the interpretation of meaning. In the mid-1960s, he began to experiment with the use of stencils, citing their “dangerously immediate” quality, “. . . comparable to a glyph in a pre-Columbian codex.”³² It is unclear what exactly Ehrenberg intended with this analogy. One way to read the statement is to consider the codex (and the *Codex*) in terms of being “dangerously immediate.” During the Spanish conquest, Jesuits destroyed pre-Columbian codices because of a deeply held belief in the power of images. While these particular glyphs posed a perceived threat to Catholic influence, they did so only during the immediate post-conquest period. By the late sixteenth century, Jesuit priests would commission codices from indigenous artists. The post-conquest works, however, were written without the use of pre-Columbian hieroglyphs, a writing system that was completely lost by the 18th century.

Focusing instead on Ehrenberg's use of the term “glyph,” one could interpret his statement in a different manner. It could be the case that glyphs, representing syllables rather than nouns or objects, are for Ehrenberg a means of codifying representation. Syllables are necessarily sounds, often fragments of complete words or thoughts. If we read the *Codex* in this way, a stencil of a man with a gun is not a literal depiction of such a figure, but rather a code to be deciphered. In this way, Ehrenberg mimics the self-consciousness by which much of twentieth-century art demands to be “read.” Abstraction can be interpreted and understood only by those who know the code. We are not privy to Ehrenberg's code,

missionaries commissioned the creation of codices for documentation of the new world and a record of interactions between Europeans and indigenous people. The most complete of these, the Florentine Codex, dates between 1540 and 1585 and is written in Spanish and Nahuatl. From Miguel León-Portilla, *Pre-Columbian Literatures of Mexico* (Oklahoma City: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986).

³¹León-Portilla, *Pre-Columbian Literatures of Mexico* (1986), 153.

³²Felipe Ehrenberg, *Codex Aeroscriptus Ehrenbergensis: A Visual Score of Iconotropisms* (1991). Although Ehrenberg wrote this description in 1991, he refers to his works of the mid-1960s.

however; the *Codex*, with its lurid television screens, palm trees and echoes of violence, evades full comprehension.³³

Ehrenberg's conceptual work moved away from the production of objects and toward the dissemination of ideas. Ehrenberg fully developed this sensibility in London, where he was received by the artists of the Fluxus movement and was active from 1968-1974.³⁴ His involvement with Fluxus led to the creation of the Beau Geste Press (BGP) in 1970, publishing artists' books and other Fluxus works. As a result of the focus on ideas, Ehrenberg's work took on a highly political dimension. His works cannot be read outside of their context, specifically the social and political repression of the 1960s and 1970s regimes in Mexico and much of Latin America.

Upon Ehrenberg's return to Mexico from Europe in 1974, he focused on "solving the riddle my European circumstances had forced on me, that of finding a meaningful way to bridge the gap between America's Indo-Hispanicism and European sophistries, to reconcile the past and the present, *as an artist, through art.*"³⁵ It could be that this statement is Ehrenberg's attempt to define the transnational discourse between Latin America (Mexico) and artistic production in Europe. Rather than the historical connection between Spain and Latin America, this transnationalism is defined as a pan-European phenomenon. Ehrenberg's imperative was to connect Fluxus ideas and European conceptualism ("European sophistries") to politically motivated artists in Mexico.

After his return to Mexico, Ehrenberg helped to lead a new generation of Mexican

³³"The reader/spectator is put in the position of being the detective trying to decode the hidden messages which structure this riotously colorful and ominous world. Transnational economics emerges as a kind of interpretive backdrop, yet nothing is bluntly stated." Harry Polkinhorn, "From Book to Anti-Book" *Visible Language*, 25 (1991): accessed March 29, 2011 <http://www.thing.net/~grist/lnd/hp-book.htm>. Speaking specifically of Ehrenberg.

³⁴D. Vanessa Kam, Felipe Ehrenberg: A Neologist's Art and Archive (Stanford: Stanford University Libraries, 2004), 2. Fluxus bridged the gap between art and publishing, an attempt by artists to control the means of distribution. The first Fluxus shows – the series of seven festivals in European cities – combined elements of performance art with music, finding common ground between the two. Fluxus was not an organized collective or movement in the traditional sense. Through its Lithuanian-born founder George Maciunas, Fluxus encompassed rigorous iconoclasm as well as corporate sensibility. Through Fluxus, performative practice became "a means to rethink the position of individual and his or her agency within the system." From Dumett, *Corporate Imaginations* (2009), 10.

³⁵Felipe Ehrenberg, "East and West – The Twain do Meet: a tale of more than two worlds," *The Subversive Imagination: Artists, Society and Social Responsibility*, ed. Carol Becker (New York: Routledge, 1994), 134-135. Emphasis Ehrenberg's.

artists and joined them in collectives.³⁶ This period, known as the *Grupos* (Group) Movement, informed much of Gómez-Peña's early career in Mexico. Gómez-Peña, in a conversation with Lisa Wolford, recognized Ehrenberg's contribution:

Felipe Ehrenberg was one of my godfathers. His generation created interdisciplinary collectives and utilized the streets of Mexico City as laboratories of experimentation, as galleries without walls.³⁷

It is important to note Gómez-Peña's continued emphasis on the experimental nature of such artistic practice. As part of their experiments, the *Grupos* Movement, the "generation" of Ehrenberg in Mexico, recognized the power of the group, or collective, over the individual. Historian Rubén Gallo has argued that the impulse to organize into collectives was endemic to Mexico, spurred by the establishment of the post-Revolution constitution in 1917.³⁸ Collectivism then permeated all facets of social and economic life. After falling out of favor with the artistic establishment during the 1950s and 1960s, collectivism came back into favor with the younger generation of the early 1970s. The *Grupos*, on the whole, espoused a utopian model of collective interaction; Ehrenberg likened the group dynamics to "...jazz bands or Afro-Cuban musicians, in which set structures provide a frame for improvisation."³⁹ This model emphasized the strengths of the individual members while working to smooth over personal differences.

Artists Victor Muñoz, Carlos Finck, and José Antonio Hernández had been working as the *Grupo Proceso Pentágono* (Pentagon Process Group) since 1973;⁴⁰ Ehrenberg joined them three years later.⁴¹ In general, the Mexican artist groups of the 1970s emphasized a number of goals. Some addressed the country's educational system, while others worked

³⁶Kam, *Felipe Ehrenberg* (2004), 6-9. Ehrenberg avoided Mexico City upon his return, choosing to teach at the Universidad Veracruzana in Xalapa, where he developed courses in print-and book-making and attempted to create an art school press.

³⁷Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Lisa Wolford, "Navigating the Minefields of Utopia: A Conversation" *The Drama Review* 46 (2002): 67.

³⁸Rubén Gallo, "The Mexican Pentagon: Adventures in Collectivism during the 1970s," *Collectivism After Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945*, eds. Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 165.

³⁹Ehrenberg, quoted in Gallo, "The Mexican Pentagon" (2007), 167.

⁴⁰Kam, *Felipe Ehrenberg* (2004), 9-10.

⁴¹Elizabeth Christine López, *The Mexican Front: Artist Collectives in Mexico City, 1968-1985* (PhD Diss, UCLA, 2002), 16.

to expose urban issues in Mexico, especially Mexico City. The *Pentágonos*, in particular, worked to educate the general public on the effects of regime change and revolution in Mexico and throughout Latin America.⁴² For example, in 1979, the group showed an installation, *Proceso:1929*, at the Experimental Section of the Annual Salon of Painting in Mexico City. Group member Muñoz described the work as an “allegory of torture in Mexico.”⁴³ The installation was in fact more direct than an allegory, as it immersed the viewer into a back-room interrogation scene. The audience, ostensibly unused to seeing such imagery, was shocked, and the “annual” experimental section was never repeated.

The following year, the *Pentágonos* attracted further controversy during the Tenth Paris Youth Biennial, when they were selected to represent Mexico in the Latin America Pavilion. Conflicts arose when Ehrenberg and the other group members became aware of the political direction of the pavilion. Led by Uruguayan curator Angel Kalenberg, plans for the pavilion would downplay the repressive nature of several military regimes in order to make them more palatable for the mostly-European audience.⁴⁴ Ehrenberg and the other group members generated an exposé of these plans for the pavilion and independently published both an exhibition catalogue and a book, *Expediente Bienal X* (Biennial Process X, 1980).⁴⁵ The book, a collection of correspondence and reviews, interspersed with commentary by Ehrenberg, brought together art, publishing and political activism into this single work.⁴⁶

The conflict between Ehrenberg (and the rest of Grupo Proceso Pentágono) and the curator Kalenberg played out in the correspondence reprinted in *Expediente Bienal X*. Kalenberg, chosen by the Aparicio Méndez-led military regime in Uruguay, had demanded that all artworks for the Paris Biennial be submitted to the committee beforehand and

⁴²Edward J. McCaughan, “Art and Identity in Mexican and Chicano Social Movements” *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, Vol 27, ed. Patrick G. Coy (Oxford, U.K.: Elsevier, 2007), 228.

⁴³A full description of the work can be found in López, *The Mexican Front* (2002). Also see “Los Patos y Las Escopetas: Los Grupos y la Sección de Experimentación” from *La Perra Brava, 2a Parte*, accessed March 28, 2011, <http://www.escaner.cl/especiales/laperrabrava/perrabrava2-02.htm>.

⁴⁴Ibid, 130-131.

⁴⁵Felipe Ehrenberg. *Expediente Bienal X: La Historia Documentada de un Complot Frustrado* (Mexico: Beau Geste Press, 1980).

⁴⁶The complete story of this event can be found in Martha Gever’s interview with Ehrenberg in *Afterimage* Vol. 10 (April 1983): 12-18. Grupo Proceso Pentágono also collaborated with writer Gabriel García Márquez on the introduction to the exhibition catalog.

reviewed by an unnamed “local critic” chosen by Kalenberg. Ehrenberg and the other *Pentágonos* noticed the discrepancy between the Latin American selection process and that of other pavilions, in which subject matter was left to the discretion of the chosen artists.⁴⁷ Kalenberg’s vision for the pavilion included an “organic” presentation, stressing the responsibility of Latin American artists to produce a coherent vision of the region.⁴⁸ The *Pentágonos* deduced the political motivation of Kalenberg and the curatorial committee, decrying the “onerous mystification that has always plagued the work of Latin Americans... and influenced it to make it acceptable to the interests of the forces in power.”⁴⁹ In other words, Ehrenberg feared the simplification of the “Latin American” art scene into a single narrative that conveniently overlooked examples of state repression (Uruguay and Argentina), subjugation (Puerto Rico) and liberation struggles (Peru).

The controversy surrounding the Latin American Pavilion in Paris served to make Ehrenberg a symbol for artist-led political resistance. His position as an artist who was already highly regarded in both Europe and Latin America allowed him and the other *Pentágonos* to stage this protest against the pavilion’s organizing committee. Using his publishing company and connections with the literary world, Ehrenberg brought to light the collusion between the curatorial committee and the regime. The resulting project could be classified as an art action, a literary work, or a gathering of evidence, blurring the line between art, journalism and political activism. Gómez-Peña, along with other Mexican artists of the younger generation, was certainly aware of Ehrenberg’s stature in Mexico and his political involvement on the international stage.

Ehrenberg’s post-1974 work in Mexico with Grupo Proceso Pentágono provided a practical inspiration for the BAW/TAF collective and a template for the kind of art-based political action they hoped to achieve. Although Ehrenberg never formally joined the group, he spent time in 1986 working with its members and participating in the collective’s meetings. Member Emily Hicks claimed that Ehrenberg intervened directly in the BAW/TAF’s

⁴⁷Felipe Ehrenberg, “¿Quién es Angel Kalenberg?” Correspondence from Grupo Proceso Pentágono to the other selected groups. February 22, 1977. *Expediente Bienal X: La Historia Documentada de un Complot Frustrado* (Mexico: Beau Geste Press, 1980), 27. Also López (2002).

⁴⁸Angel Kalenberg, “Letter to Alberto Híjar (Grupo TAI)” December 10, 1976. *Expediente Bienal X: La Historia Documentada de un Complot Frustrado* (Mexico: Beau Geste Press, 1980), 15.

⁴⁹Ehrenberg, “¿Quién es Angel Kalenberg?” (1977), 28.

interpersonal conflicts.⁵⁰ From his years in Europe and involvement with Fluxus, Ehrenberg brought to the BAW/TAF a strong conceptual grounding and an international outlook. His work as part of Grupo Proceso Pentágono, specifically, provided a model for social change through art. Performance artist and BAW/TAF member Emily Hicks credited Ehrenberg with a revitalization of the group, claiming that without him, the BAW/TAF “wouldn’t have had the confidence to go against the muralists of the old school and the traditional way of doing political art.”⁵¹ The “old school” to which she refers was the group of more traditional Chicano artists, who continued to tread the well-worn racial themes of *indigenismo* and *mestizaje*.⁵² The BAW/TAF, with their transnational composition and focus on a single prominent political issue, directly challenged essentialist Chicano modes of representation. The decision to view the world not in terms of a racial conflict or ethnic identity, but as a zone of contact and experimentation, was a start.

Ehrenberg’s influence has historically been overshadowed by the interpersonal dynamics of the BAW/TAF. Cal Arts-educated Gómez-Peña was familiar with Ehrenberg’s involvement with the Fluxus movement as well as the Pentágonos, but the BAW/TAF’s very collectivism worked to obscure the contributions of individual members. Although the BAW/TAF members sought to emulate Ehrenberg’s experience of “improvisational” dynamics, the realities of collective artistic practice overwhelmed them. During the period between 1984 and 1989, the year that Gómez-Peña, Ochoa and Hicks left, the BAW/TAF was controlled by a number of strong male personalities, each fighting to have his opinions heard. Until the three members left, Avalos, Ochoa, and Gómez-Peña were often in conflict with each other.⁵³ Decisions as to the nature of collaborative artworks and performance

⁵⁰Hicks, Interview with the author (2010).

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid. See also Shifra M. Goldman, “Response: Another Opinion on the State of Chicano Art” in *Dimensions of the Americas: Art and Social Change in Latin America and the United States* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994), 383.

⁵³The conflicts within the BAW/TAF were expressed along ethnic and gender lines. For the group’s female members, Sara-Jo Berman and later Emily Hicks and Rocio Weiss, the challenge was to mediate between their individual directions as artists while representing the female interests in the collective. The Chicano Movement had been highly masculine, and these attitudes continued with the BAW/TAF. The collective’s goal, to create politically motivated art in response to the conditions at the U.S.-Mexico border, could not be fully realized without the female perspective. Women’s experiences of the border, Chicanismo, internationalism and nationalism, were necessarily distinct from those of their male counterparts. Class conflict within the group was also prevalent. Gómez-Peña, born to affluent parents in Mexico City, brought with him an entirely different perspective than Chicano activist Avalos and binational border-crosser Ochoa.

were made in group meetings, and it is impossible to chart the origin of specific ideas. The contributions of individuals were more readily apparent in installations such as the *Border Realities* series, in which the works of different group members appeared side-by-side. Ochoa's murals could co-exist with Gómez-Peña's performances. This is not to say that no collaboration (and resulting tension) existed in these installations, but simply that when the group members were showcased as individuals, one could get a sense of each artistic and conceptual contribution.

Ehrenberg's influence was felt in two major events from 1986. The first, the collaborative site-specific performance *End of the Line*, took place on October 12, 1986. The second, the performance-symposium *Café Urgente*, occurred four days later, on October 16th.⁵⁴ Avalos described the latter project as "An interdisciplinary border art event with a discussion among humanities scholars, artists, researchers and a public audience" in a "café environment."⁵⁵ Among the issues addressed were creating a "contemporary profile of the United States-Mexico border region," the "social dynamics of migrant labor" and the "dynamics of culture and creation of contemporary 'border consciousness.'"⁵⁶

The discussion took place in front of an audience of over 130 people at the Centro Cultural de la Raza, co-sponsor of the event.⁵⁷ At 7pm on the 16th, Ehrenberg, along with co-participants literary theorist Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, historian David Maciel, sociologist James Cockroft and journalist Alan Weisman, participated in a café-style roundtable in front of a live audience, a form of academic performance. BAW/TAF members staged "interventions" during the discussion, including moderation from Avalos and dramatic multilingual performance vignettes by Gómez-Peña.

This image, the inside cover from the *Café Urgente* brochure, deserves a closer look.

The basic conflict was one of essentialism – should the experience of a "native" border-dweller be privileged over others? This debate would re-emerge during the criticism of the San Diego-Tijuana art festival InSite, which I will discuss in Chapter Five.

⁵⁴Even though *Café Urgente* took place after *End of the Line*, the two projects were planned simultaneously, and *End of the Line* represents a culmination of the BAW/TAF's exploration of sitedness. Because of this significance, I will discuss *End of the Line* in more detail after *Café Urgente*.

⁵⁵David Avalos, *Café Urgente* Grant Application to the Centro Cultural de la Raza, San Diego; July 31, 1986.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷"NC artist worked on border consciousness drama," *National City Star-News*, Sunday, October 19, 1986.

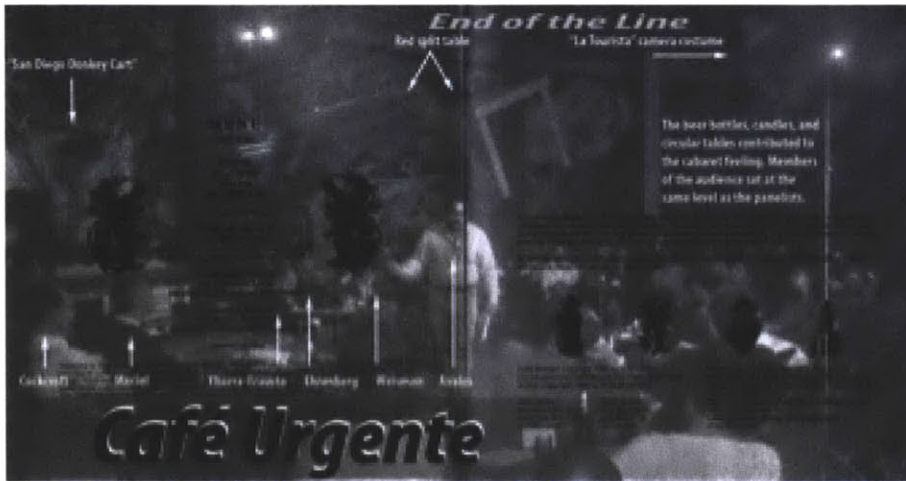


Figure 3-4: Brochure from *Café Urgente*, 1986. Image courtesy of David Avalos.

The text is laid over a grayscale image from the performance-symposium, depicting the round table, the academics (labeled), and the audience. Props from previous BAW/TAF works, including Avalos' "San Diego Donkey Cart" and the red table from *End of the Line* hang suspended above the participants. These symbols served as shorthand for the BAW/TAF's oeuvre and were meant to evoke the collective's two-year history of action on the border. It is likely that the *Café Urgente* audience would have had at least passing familiarity with the earlier works, and in fact many of them might have been present for *End of the Line* four days prior. As is evident from the post-event brochure, the set-up of the room preserved a distinction between the performers (academics) and their audience. From this image, the "café atmosphere" promised by Avalos is not readily evident. The goal, however, was to enliven the panel discussion format and use the gathering of academics and audience to generate new ideas about the U.S.-Mexico border.

The connection of academic discourse with performance art was a major advancement of the BAW/TAF. This idea betrayed a realism of the limits to the power of art projects to enact social change. By combining performance art and "academic performance," the BAW/TAF broadened the scope of its inquiry. Fluxus, Ehrenberg, and the Mexican *Grupos* had previously emphasized the link between art and publishing, as well as art as informational critique. These collectives emphasized the dissemination and transmission of information from artists to the public. The BAW/TAF took this idea a step further,

connecting the academy, artists and the general public in a single symposium-performance. *Café Urgente* provided academics and artists with a forum to discuss the border situation and voice their opinions on controversial subjects. At the same time, the speakers were held accountable to the audience.

The presentations were not strictly organized; the participants were provided ahead of time with a list of potential questions and subjects to address. Each panelist was expected to address subject matter of his expertise for fifteen minutes (or, in the case of Weisman, to read from his recently published book *La Frontera: The United States Border With Mexico*). The discussion questions, written by Avalos, included “How do you define border culture or border consciousness?” “How does Mexico affect the U.S. and vice versa?” “What does looking closely at the border tell us when our view returns to mainstream Mexico or the U.S.?” “What hope for future Mexico-U.S. relations can be found in border consciousness?”⁵⁸ It is important to note that these subjects were not specific to art or literature, but could cross all disciplines. By asking writers, a historian, literary theorist and an artist to offer their perspectives on the subject, the BAW/TAF emphasized interdisciplinary inclusiveness over academic segregation.



Figure 3-5: The *Café Urgente* stage (1986). Image from the California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives, University of California-Santa Barbara.

⁵⁸From David Avalos, “Urgente Documents,” correspondence with the author, July 31, 2010.

Ehrenberg's inclusion in *Café Urgente* underscored his importance to the BAW/TAF. The artist himself, his Fluxus background, and his association with the *Grupos* movement allowed him to endorse the group's more sophisticated conceptualization of the border. As Gómez-Peña described, the BAW/TAF's way of thinking changed:

We began to theorize the border as a paradigm, as a theoretical paradigm that would contest Eurocentric postmodern paradigms. And as my generation began to look at the border, we began to look at what we saw as the borderization of other urban centers. And the border culture was a phenomenon that was taking place not just at the geopolitical borders, but was extending pretty much to the major metropolises.⁵⁹

This conception of the border laid the foundation for what Gómez-Peña would term the “portable border.”⁶⁰ Portability is conceptually distinct from the “borderization of other urban centers” noted by Gómez-Peña. The BAW/TAF saw this borderization in the cultural enclaves carved out within U.S. cities as a form of urban ghettoization.⁶¹ Mexican migrant communities in Chicago and Los Angeles, for example, reproduced the U.S.-Mexico border within their framework. This phenomenon could never be a truly independent one – borderization in the U.S. interior occurred partly as a means to preserve Mexican culture, family structure and society in the midst of Anglo America. The other side of this phenomenon, however, meant that Mexican-Americans (and other immigrant communities) formed urban ghettos, traditionally marked as centers of low-rent and high crime (such as East L.A. or San Diego's Barrio Logan). Through shifts in language and cultural signifiers, first- and second-generation immigrants extended the border and its milieu far from the physical line.

⁵⁹Gómez-Peña, Interview with the author (2009).

⁶⁰Initially conceived of as an internationalization of the border – itself an international phenomenon – the idea of portability would inform later works of the BAW/TAF, as well as the post-1990 career of Gómez-Peña and his troupe *La Pocha Nostra*. I will discuss the portable border further in Chapter Four, but it is important to note that the internationalism of Fluxus and other European conceptual art helped to push the BAW/TAF in that particular direction.

⁶¹The concept of ghettoization refers back to the first Jewish ghetto in Venice, and later versions in European cities such as Prague. Unlike twentieth- and twenty-first century urban enclaves, these ghettos were legally enforced, restricting the location of Jewish people within the cities. In a sense, the Jewish ghettos of Europe produced a condition similar to the U.S.-Mexico border, rather than the “borderization of urban centers” described by Gómez-Peña.

The initial impact of Ehrenberg, the *Grupos* Movement and conceptualism on the Border Art Workshop was felt in their works of the late 1980s. Rather than radically dissociating border art from the U.S.-Mexico border, the group embarked upon a series of projects that explored the relationship between border art and its site. The result of this experimentation was to conceptualize the border as a performance in itself. With border art, the primary focus of understanding is the nature of the interaction between the border and its crosser. If a U.S. citizen, or a “legal” Mexican worker crosses the line, the action is a border crossing mediated by diplomatic regulations. When an undocumented crosser goes from Mexico to the United States, the movement is transgressive and putatively illegal. When an artist intentionally crosses the border as part of a piece, legally or illegally, the result is a performance in the most basic sense – a body performing an action and labeling it “art.”⁶² The BAW/TAF’s most significant contribution to U.S.-Mexico border art was the expansion of this third category. It could be said that the group viewed the border itself as a performance, one between nations rather than an artist and his or her audience. In doing so, the BAW/TAF created the potential for every border crossing to become performance art.

The first BAW/TAF performance to take place on the U.S.-Mexico border prefigured the conceptualization of a new paradigm at *Café Urgente*. *End of the Line* occurred mere days before *Café Urgente* and was linked to it in both content and concept. *End of the Line* would use a bold gesture of community building to blur the border, while *Café Urgente* presented this reconceptualization of the border as an academic discourse mixed with performance vignettes in a town hall setting. On October 12, 1986, BAW/TAF members, temporary collaborators, and bystanders from San Diego and Tijuana enacted a Thanksgiving dinner/Last Supper at Imperial Beach. The site, the beach on the border between San Diego and Tijuana, was especially significant. On the U.S. side, Imperial Beach becomes the Tijuana Estuary, a natural reserve that is part of California’s Border Field State Park. The marshy terrain is undeveloped along the estuary and home to a naval base further north,

⁶²Whether the artist uses an illegal crossing as a “performance” is beside the point for authorities. The idea of border crossing as performance can be expanded further, assuming that anyone going through the ritual of immigration and customs is presenting an altered version of her- or himself. This situation results in a performance, at its most basic level.

resulting in a beach environment with no commercial development. In 1986, the year that *End of the Line* took place, the border fence stopped partway through the beach. It was possible, therefore, to cross from one side to the other without encountering immigration or customs officials. The BAW/TAF chose Imperial Beach as the site for their performance for this very reason: it was the only place within the San Diego-Tijuana region where *End of the Line* could commence unimpeded.

Twelve performers wearing oversized sculptural costumes depicting “border stereotypes”⁶³ surrounded a table painted to look like a stretch of highway and placed straddling the border line. On the highway/table were three items: an arm, dice on top of a miniature upside-down table, and a heart with a cross.⁶⁴ Avalos has described the symbolism as follows: the arm refers to the guest workers from the Bracero Program (1942-1964),⁶⁵ while the dice represent the bad luck of crossing. Finally, the heart and cross symbolized syncretic Catholicism. The performers then engaged in a communal meal of corn-on-the-cob (Mexican-style “elotes”)⁶⁶ while rotating the table. Because of the rotation, the performers made multiple border crossings, back and forth, within a short period of time. Audience members were invited to participate and share corn, and the scene took on the atmosphere of a large party.

Michael Schnorr described *End of the Line* as follows:

... the idea there was that somehow, when we got on the border we would turn this table, which was shaped like a freeway, a play on the Last Supper. And then we would divide corn and we would invite the corn vendors, who sell corn in those big tubs of water, and invite them down, and by the time of the end of the performance, nobody would know which side of the border they were on.

⁶³The characters were on the Mexican side: “el Taxi,” (the Taxi) “La Criada,” (the Housekeeper) “La Facil,” (the Easy) “el Vato,” (the Dude) “el Nopal,” (the Prickly Pear) and “el Indio” (the Indian) while on the U.S. side: “el Surfer,” “la Tourista,” (the Tourist) “la Punk,” (the Punk) “el Marine,” (the Marine) “la Migra,” (the Border Patrol) and “el Obispo.” (the Bishop) (From David Avalos, “Fun Facts about *End of the Line*,” n.d., personal correspondence with the author, July 31, 2010).

⁶⁴David Avalos, “Fun Facts about *End of the Line*.”

⁶⁵Described in Chapter One.

⁶⁶Corn, or *maize* as it is called in Mexico, is an important symbol of life and sustenance in Latin America. The Olmecs in particular translated their reliance upon corn into an act of worship. There is evidence that at least one Olmec deity was represented by the symbol of corn. For more, see Karl Taube, “The Olmec Maize God: The Face of Corn in Formative Mesoamerica,” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 29/30 (1996): 39-81.

Because the fence ended 100 yards from the water and there was just 100 yards of beach. So I knew that all we had to do was get it going. And the border patrol would say out of there; the Mexican cops would stay out of there because everybody was happy, and they were watching people in big goofy costumes and there were photographers around and everyone seemed to be having a good time. And no one really knew what was going on.⁶⁷

It is important to note that last statement, “no one really knew what was going on.” This kind of impromptu confusion is endemic to the U.S.-Mexico border situation and would characterize later works of the BAW/TAF. The end goal was to proliferate this productive confusion in the minds of the audience, countering the popular image of the lawless no-man’s land with one of spontaneity and community, ultimately subverting the controlling authorities.



Figure 3-6: *End of the Line* (1986). View of costumes and table. Image courtesy of David Avalos.

Through *End of the Line*, the BAW/TAF pioneered the use of performance art to comment on the international border. Earlier generations of Chicano artists had focused primarily on mural and poster art in North American cities, while Asco had staged their performances of the 1970s in Los Angeles, situated far from the border line itself. What,

⁶⁷Schnorr, Interview with the author (2009).

then, **initiated the specific connection between performance and the border?** BAW/TAF artists have cited several different reasons. According to Gómez-Peña, “overlapping universes could only be articulated by an equally complex art form” – with performance being the means to convey such an occurrence “because in many ways performance is a border language. . . [it] is the clash of disparate elements in the same way the border is.”⁶⁸ Schnorr took a different approach to the question of **border performance**, citing a piece he created in the 1970s on Imperial Beach. He and a group of friends constructed wood-and-sand structures along the shore, monuments that were gradually washed south to Mexico with the ocean currents.⁶⁹ For Schnorr, this piece served as a precursor to border performances, with the elements of nature serving as the performers and the border crossing taking place on a geologic scale.



Figure 3-7: Schnorr’s pyramid on Imperial Beach, CA (1970s). Image courtesy of Michael Schnorr.

Although there is no single explanation for why performance and the border became linked, I would cite the BAW/TAF as the key agent of this conceptualization. The collective became a kind of lens through which ideas of Chicanismo and conceptualism were fused, creating the hybrid art form of border performance. Yet even as this fusion came into focus, the BAW/TAF would serve as the starting point for a divergence of border art as well, dispersing Gómez-Peña with his experiments in portability, Avalos with his politically

⁶⁸Gómez-Peña, Interview with the author (2009).

⁶⁹Schnorr, Interview with the author (2009).

motivated art, and Schnorr's traveling incarnation of the BAW/TAF. Victor Ochoa would also continue his artistic career, choosing to work with children in designing educational mural programs. *End of the Line* is significant because during the performance, a number of critical concepts condensed: ideas from Chicanismo – the politics of Herman Baca and Bert Corona; Ehrenberg and his politically motivated conceptualism; Fluxus performance and happenings. *End of the Line* also consolidated the artists, if only for a moment – all of the original BAW/TAF members were involved, along with their individual approaches to the border and performance art.⁷⁰

End of the Line also linked Chicanismo and performance art through the concepts of borderization, the border as a portable, performative site, and *rasquachismo*. The rasquache perspective, described in Chapter Two, was born out of Chicano culture and the need to improvise, mediating between (and juxtaposing) high and low. Ochoa elaborated on the BAW/TAF and rasquachismo:

Rasquache means that we grab whatever it is that we've got and we put it together. But we know, that that's because it's all we've got. But when we put it together, it's our art, and then it goes to another dimension. We might call it rasquache art... we don't discriminate between high and low.⁷¹

End of the Line betrayed this rasquache sensibility, casting it in terms of an Oldenbergian pop art aesthetic. The oversized costumes, many representing inanimate objects were carved from blocks of foam and spray-painted with cartoonish representations of border figures.⁷² For example, the character of *la migra*, the ever-vigilant border patrol agent – was represented as a giant pair of binoculars, keeping constant watch on the proceedings. The ridiculous nature of the costumes complemented their impromptu nature, composed of low

⁷⁰The 1986 performance was also, not coincidentally, the only event during which all the original BAW/TAF members were photographed together. The photograph has never been reproduced due to copyright issues. The photographer has since become unavailable and cannot be contacted for permission.

⁷¹Ochoa, Interview with the author (2010).

⁷²Ibid. Ochoa recounted the origin of the costumes: "Guillermo says well we need some costumes, we'll stand out in the middle of the sand. And I said 'well, how far are people going to see this from?'... I think he had suggested those things, two boards and you stick your neck out through the top, and I thought that's boring, there's got to be something better. And sculptural." This description makes evident the improvisational quality of the costumes.

cost or found materials and hastily constructed. This aesthetic, including the rasquache perspective behind it, mimics and reflects the border's migrant inhabitants. For these perennial underdogs, the border demands a similar approach.



Figure 3-8: *End of the Line*, "La Migra." Image courtesy of David Avalos.

As Chapter 2 details, Asco had accomplished the connection between the Chicano Movement and performance with *Walking Mural*, but in *End of the Line*, all three – the border, Chicanismo, and performance art – were intertwined in a single moment. Both pieces brought characters to life through the use of outlandish costumes and symbols, and the original idea of such a performance belongs to Asco. What the BAW/TAF contributed to this history was to ground its piece in the site, almost as if the foam costumes, these border denizens, had sprung from the sand of Imperial Beach fully formed. The BAW/TAF emphasis on the idea of stereotype is also productive. Both Avalos and Schnorr, in their descriptions of the event, used the specific term to describe the characters. Stereotyping, in the case of both Asco and the BAW/TAF, was intended to produce critical distance through parody. In *End of the Line* the artists and audience could poke fun at the forces of containment (la Migra, the Border Patrol), as well as images of daily life (the Taxi, the Surfer).

It is clear from the discussion of stereotyping that BAW/TAF members were aware

of Asco's work from the previous decade, but *End of the Line* served as more than a simple retread of *Walking Mural*. Primarily, the BAW/TAF's performance drew on cultural and border stereotypes without precedence in Chicano muralism. Rather than portray the Virgin of Guadalupe, for example, the BAW/TAF chose a more generic religious parody unconnected with mural art, Michael Schnorr's "Obispo" (Bishop). The characters of *End of the Line* also interacted in distinctly non-mural ways. Not only did they move (as did Asco's *Walking Mural* figures), but they ate, spoke, celebrated and interacted with the audience. Rather than an Asco-esque critique of Chicano muralism, the BAW/TAF's piece represented a complete break from the tradition.

Some scholars, even the BAW/TAF's own Emily Hicks, have argued that Asco's work presented a more sophisticated view of Chicanismo and multicultural dynamics than any of the BAW/TAF's pieces. Hicks attributed the differences to the group's locations (Los Angeles in the 1970s vs. San Diego in the 1980s), and their relative proximity to the art world and the flow of funds.⁷³ For border art, however, it is clear that *End of the Line* used site-specificity in a new and significant way. While Asco's performance used Los Angeles as a backdrop, specifically Whittier Boulevard, the BAW/TAF gave the U.S.-Mexico border salience in their performance (if only to whip it into confusion). Along with the oversized costumes and stereotypical figures, the physical border line itself became a character – the most important, one could argue. With the border serving as an "invisible" actor in the performance, the connection between these bodies and their site becomes apparent.

Along similar lines as Asco's *Spray Paint LACMA*, the BAW/TAF's performance crossed the bounds of legality. Of great significance was the fact that *End of the Line* took place without any official permission or sanction and yet happened without incident. The performers, whether Mexican, Chicano, or Anglo, committed numerous illegal border crossings during the piece.⁷⁴ BAW/TAF members had considered the ramifications of these actions, but deliberately chose not to seek approval from either U.S. or Mexican authorities. Avalos underscored the necessity of this illegality:

⁷³Hicks, Interview with the author (2010).

⁷⁴Even U.S. citizens who do not cross through the official channels, with appropriate immigration and customs checks, are considered illegal.

... we understood that we were breaking the law at End of the Line, and when one of the members had suggested that we get official permission from both Mexico and the United States, we said that's antithetical to what we are doing, because the intention of the piece is to say that despite the media's presentation of the border as such a dangerous place, we can go over there dressed in these ridiculous costumes and share a meal with people from both sides....⁷⁵

This aspect of *End of the Line* stands in sharp contrast to border performances that would follow, as in Venezuelan-born Javier Téllez's 2005 *One Flew Over the Void*. mentioned in Chapter One and fully discussed in Chapter Five, Téllez's intervention (stuntman and cannon) was accompanied by a request for official sanction for the work, clearing the stuntman's crossing with the Border Patrol ahead of time and deliberately choosing a U.S. citizen to avoid any bureaucratic delays. In contrast, *End of the Line* had U.S. citizens, American-born Chicanos and Mexican citizens crossing back and forth, ignoring the international border as part of the very spirit of the performance.

In this manner, the BAW/TAF momentarily dissolved the border even as their actions emphasized the physical line. This performative paradox would only deepen by the end of the twentieth century. On the one hand, borders became more fluid than ever since the first stirrings of nationalism; on the other, borders had become more closed and reinforced. Never before had it been so simple for travelers from industrialized ally nations to enter the United States. At the same time, it had never been so difficult for citizens of less-favored nations to make that same journey.⁷⁶

Border crossing art projects and performance pieces have had to navigate legal as well

⁷⁵Avalos, Interview with the author (2010). BAW/TAF members were not wholly unprepared for official intervention, however. Avalos described the contingencies in place for dealing with Mexican authorities (Ochoa and Avalos would describe the situation in Spanish) and with the Border Patrol (Schnorr and Avalos would explain the nature of the art piece and cite the involvement of Southwestern College students). The U.S. Border Patrol did come across the scene partway through the performance. Describing the piece a university art project, Schnorr managed to keep the authorities at bay. It is hard to imagine this scene occurring on the twenty-first century border; the beach stands eerily silent, with the hum of aerial surveillance drones occasionally breaking the spell.

⁷⁶Historian Frederick Cooper's idea of "lumpy" globalization provides an excellent characterization of these phenomena: "The world has long been... a space where economic and political relations are very uneven; it is filled with lumps, places where power coalesces surrounded by those where it does not... Structures and networks penetrate certain places and do certain things with great intensity, but their effects tail off elsewhere." Frederick Cooper, "What is the Concept of Globalization Good For? An African Historian's Perspective," *African Affairs* 100 (2001): 190.

as physical and cultural territory. Téllez' *One Flew Over the Void*, part of the binational festival InSite, was not the only cross-border performance to require official permission beforehand or risk legal action. Twenty-first century projects that subvert the authority of the Border Patrol have been more likely to draw negative attention. For instance, Professor Ricardo Domínguez of the University of California San Diego saw his "Transborder Immigrant Tool" become the subject of investigation by U.S. authorities. The project involved the distribution of GPS-enabled mobile phones to undocumented crossers. These phones were loaded with a program that pointed the way to water stations in the desert.⁷⁷ According to authorities, the Transborder Immigrant Tool used public funds to assist people committing illegal actions.⁷⁸ For these lawmakers, the fact that the tool managed to save lives was immaterial.

Legal considerations underscored every border crossing performance, beginning with *End of the Line*. After the escalation of drug-related violence, narco-trafficking and human smuggling along the border in the early twenty-first century, artists had to give greater and greater consideration to the legal ramifications of their actions. As a result, performances that were only somewhat risky in the 1980s would have been impossible to enact in later years. In essence, the standards for what is considered "shocking" on the border have changed accordingly. Téllez' human cannonball performance broke no laws, but by 2005, the image of a man flying across the border, legal or otherwise, was more than enough to generate attention.

This discussion brings us back to *End of the Line*, allowing a consideration of the performance as an artifact of its time period. On November 6, 1986, almost a month after the BAW/TAF performance, the U.S. Congress enacted the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), bringing immigration once again to the nation's attention.⁷⁹ Although the

⁷⁷A full description of the project can be found online, accessed March 27, 2011, <http://post.thing.net/node/1642>.

⁷⁸An opinion piece in Sign On San Diego stated that "surely, an overwhelming majority of state taxpayers would oppose their dollars being used to develop an application for this purpose, especially when it comes at an even greater cost over time." Duncan Hunter, "Taxpayers Should be Outraged at the Use of Public Funds," Sign On San Diego, March 7, 2010, accessed March 27, 2011: <http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/2010/mar/07/taxpayers-should-be-outraged-use-funds/>.

⁷⁹Timothy J. Dunn. *The Militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1978-1992* (Austin: CMAS, 1996), 4. It is important to note that U.S. consciousness of immigration has, historically, occurred in cycles. Initially,

Bracero Program had ended over two decades earlier, waves of undocumented immigration had continued in major U.S. cities. It was common for illegal border crossers to simply hop over the fence in San Diego or swim across the river in downtown El Paso. Smaller border cities, such as Nogales, did not yet draw the numbers of attempted border crossers, and the open desert was not even considered as an option. *End of the Line* took place in San Diego-Tijuana, where the border fence ended before reaching the beach. It was common, as late as the 1980s, for U.S. citizens to walk across the border on the beach, have a meal in Tijuana, and head back before dark, unmolested by the Border Patrol.

End of the Line capitalized on this ease of movement, an ease that would soon be lost with the advent of IRCA and later, the 1991 Operation Gatekeeper. The BAW/TAF performance thus literally took place at the “end of the line” – the end of the border fence – but also the end of the line temporally. Although the artists would not have known it at the time, the performance marked the end of “openness” on Imperial Beach and ultimately, the beginning of large-scale border militarization. It is ironic, then, that the BAW/TAF artists were not celebrating the border’s openness, but performing a critique of the measures already in place. The debate surrounding IRCA was already in the national consciousness by the time of *End of the Line*, and the performance represented a last attempt to emphasize the communal aspects of the border (the similarities between the United States and Mexico) rather than the stark economic, social and political differences.

As stated in the introduction to this dissertation, the linking of art with boundaries was not an invention of the BAW/TAF, or even of the twentieth century. Art, and the realm of the visual in general, had always been associated with territory and control. One could take as an example the family crests on the city gates of medieval Genoa, or the programmatic mapping of New World genealogies by sixteenth-century Spanish artists.⁸⁰

immigrants are welcomed when the economy is on the rise, creating an underclass, as with the waves of European migration in the 19th century and the start of the Bracero Program during the Second World War. When the amount of immigration reaches a critical mass, often coupled with economic uncertainty, migration occupies more and more of the national debate. Finally, legislation is passed, resulting in the actions of Operation Wetback, and IRCA, which calms national fears. Apart from Dunn’s historical account, both Herman Baca and David Avalos note this cycle. Herman Baca, Interview with the author, April 26, 2010, and Avalos, Interview with the author (2010).

⁸⁰For more on Medieval Genoa, see Daine Owen Hughes, “Urban Growth and Family Structure in Medieval Genoa,” *Past and Present* 66 (1975): 3-28. For an analysis of casta paintings, see Magali Marie Carrera,

BAW/TAF artists contributed greatly to the dissociation of border-conscious art from this idea of control. These actions were not intended as displays of power or territory; the goal of *End of the Line* was to emphasize the sense of community between the two countries. For the performance, as well as subsequent works such as *Border Sutures* (1990) and *Conversion of Columbus* (1991), collective members worked to erase the boundaries between nations.⁸¹

The problematic of the BAW/TAF first appeared with *End of the Line*; specifically, how to negotiate site-specificity in the context of an international border without reinforcing the border and the resulting system of immigration. By situating the performance directly on the border and engaging in a series of mini-crossings, the BAW/TAF members directly confronted this problem. In a way, the caricatures were intended to stand out against the border, complementing the exaggerated rhetoric of a “border conflict” with oversized, comical costumes. I contend that **although the border disappears in the table’s constant turning, it is simultaneously reinforced in the “portable” stereotypes, a paradox that reflects the nature of late-twentieth century borders and border art. This paradox is found in every instance, from the Chicano murals to the binational festival InSite.**

End of the Line lived on in other BAW/TAF exhibitions, especially the 1987 *Border Realities III*. This third iteration of the original BAW/TAF show, exhibited at San Diego’s Centro Cultural de la Raza, presented the border as a series of vignettes. **Gómez-Peña and Hicks collaborated on an installation, *The Wall*, that contained politically and artistically provocative images such as the diptych *On Which Side of the Border is the Avant-Garde?*** This image is a study in surface contrasts. The upper portion consists of an indigenous warrior carrying an unconscious woman, as he gazes up and out of the frame. The scene is a kitschy representation of the “Volcanic Legend” from Mexican popular culture.⁸² Gómez-Peña and Hicks appropriated the Jesús Helguera painting *La Leyenda de*

Imagining identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).

⁸¹For *Border Sutures*, BAW/TAF members symbolically “sutured” the border with giant metal staples. *Conversion of Columbus* was more of a work of theater detailing the landing of Columbus in the Americas. The performance utilized oversize foam costumes similar to *End of the Line* and also took place on the physical border line (this time an abandoned “soccer field” on the border line, which had been a site of community gathering).

⁸²The “Leyenda Volcan” is a popular myth describing two volcanoes, Ixtaccihuatl and Popocatepetl, outside Mexico City. The legend is described (in Mexican calendars) as follows: “At the beginning of history,



**ON WHICH SIDE OF THE BORDER
IS THE AVANT-GARDE?**

Figure 3-9: Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Emily Hicks, *On Which Side of the Border is the Avant-Garde?* From *Border Realities III* (1987). Image courtesy of David Avalos.

los Volcanes (1940). Below, a futuristic scene plays out, with an armor-clad robo-cop posed against a spire-filled skyline. Under the images, Gómez-Peña and Hicks pose the seemingly

when the Aztecs arrived in the Valley of Anahuac, before the mountains had reached their permanent form, a beautiful princess named Mixtli was born, in the city of Tenochtitlan. She was the daughter of Tizoc, the Tlatoani Emperor of the Mexicas. Mixtli was sought after by numerous noblemen, among them Axooxco, a cruel and bloodthirsty man, who demanded the hand of Mixtli in marriage. However, Mixtli's heart belonged instead to a humble peasant named Popoca. Popoca went into battle, to conquer the title of Caballero Aguila. If he claimed this title of nobility, Popoca would be able to fight Axooxco for the hand of Mixtli. Mixtli knew the danger Popoca was in, and then, wrongly, heard that he was killed. But in fact, Popoca was returning victorious. Not realizing this, Mixtli killed herself, rather than live without Popoca. When Popoca returned to find Mixtli dead, he picked her up and carried her body into the mountains. Hoping that the cold snow would wake her from sleep, reuniting them alive, Popoca stayed at her feet, bent over, watching for her to come awake. They have remained there ever since, and the body of Mixtli has become the volcano Ixtaccihuatl (the Sleeping Woman), the ever-watchful Popoca has become the volcano Popocatepetl (the Smoking Mountain), and Axooxco has become the Cerro Ajusco (the highpoint of the Distrito Federal). Ever since, these volcanoes have towered above the city of Mexico. The romantic legend of this couple has been passed on, ever since the Pre-Columbian era, and so now the people of Mexico know the origin of these magnificent volcanoes.”

straightforward question, “On which side of the border is the avant-garde?” The images, however, give no single answer. The *Leyenda* itself is an epitome of Mexican kitsch, found reproduced in calendar art and souvenir shops. It is possible to read the futuristic scene as a representation of the 1980s pop culture mainstream. The *Robocop* film, after all, had been released that same year. Gómez-Peña and Hicks used this image to imply that there is no avant-garde on the border, only the perception of one. The BAW/TAF’s rasquache aesthetic from *End of the Line* and the *Border Realities* series would fit ostensibly into this milieu.

Emily Hicks also collaborated with Robert Sánchez on a text, *English, the Official Language of California*, which pointed out the contrast between the official language and the number of streets, places and institutions with Spanish names. Avalos contributed several installations, including one depicting the border as Möbius Strip, consisting of a stretch of highway surrounded by a fence in the shape of a Möbius Strip.⁸³ Schnorr also created a wall installation, a three-dimensional multimedia image of the border crossing with the illuminated word “HELL” below the crossing. The net result of these different pieces was to present a coherent BAW/TAF vision of the U.S.-Mexico border, a single whole consisting of many different voices.

As stated earlier, *Border Realities III* also contained an installation of *End of the Line*. The goal of this part of the installation was to evoke the original *End of the Line* for the gallery audience. How was it possible to repackage a performance, one so firmly rooted in its site, for an exhibition? The BAW/TAF members used a shorthand from the original performance to evoke the experience of having been present. Ochoa’s designs for the foam costumes were reproduced as “Loteria Cards” – “photo murals” airbrushed with colored spray paint. The installation also contained contributions from Sánchez and Schnorr, a red Styrofoam table broken in half, a highway, a worker’s shirt and navy ships, all signs that conveyed in shorthand the border, the San Diego-Tijuana region, and the performance. Finally, the costumes and photographic documentation from the day of the performance

⁸³The conceptualization of the border as a Möbius Strip, a one-sided surface that doubles back on itself, continues the theme of reshaping the border. Earlier, I quoted Gómez-Peña referring to the border line as a “spiral model.”



Figure 3-10: View of *Border Realities III*, Centro Cultural de la Raza (1986). David Avalos' Möbius Strip and Schnorr's *Hell* installation are both visible in this image. Image courtesy of David Avalos.

adorned the wall, depicting the audience, the artists and the general atmosphere of *End of the Line*.⁸⁴

After *Border Realities III*, the BAW/TAF underwent a series of changes, both in the group's composition and international outlook. Sara-Jo Berman left after her divorce from Gómez-Peña, and conceptual artist D. Emily Hicks officially joined the group in November of 1987.⁸⁵ Hicks had lived in Los Angeles during the late 1970s and early 1980s, befriending

⁸⁴The show was well received and the connection of installation to the earlier performance made apparent. The Los Angeles Times' critic noted that photographs, objects and texts throughout the installation recalled the October 12 event. He went on to call *Border Realities III* "some of the most energetic art to be seen in San Diego" citing its "passion, as well as intelligence and poetry." Robert McDonald, "Border Realities Coming Alive" Los Angeles Times, March 10, 1987.

⁸⁵Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo, "Errata Historica" 1991. From the BAW/TAF archive, Imperial Beach, CA and Chula Vista, CA.



Figure 3-11: Victor Ochoa, “Loteria Cards” *Border Realities III* (1987). Image courtesy of David Avalos.

the members of Asco in the process. Her connection to the L.A. Chicanos generated tension within the BAW/TAF after she joined, as some members resented Asco’s celebrity status in the art world.⁸⁶ This tension between the San Diego-based BAW/TAF and Los Angeles manifested itself in the BAW/TAF’s “lower-class” aesthetic, which could be described as internationally targeted *rasquachismo*.

The composition of the BAW/TAF changed further, as founder David Avalos left in November of that same year. He cited an obligation to family and a teaching career as his reasons, and continued to make “socially and politically engaged” border art in a smaller capacity.⁸⁷ His subsequent projects included two collaborations with artists/filmmakers Elizabeth Sisco and Louis Hock, a 1988 bus poster project and *Art Rebate* (1993).⁸⁸ In

⁸⁶Hicks, Interview with the author (2010).

⁸⁷Avalos, Interview with the author (2010).

⁸⁸Ibid. The bus project with Sisco and Hock entailed placing political posters on the sides of San Diego city buses. The posters read “San Diego: America’s Finest Tourist Plantation” and recalled the city’s slogan (“America’s Finest City”). This highly visible project brought attention to the status of San Diego’s immigrant underclass and the role they play in maintaining the tourism economy, likening the practice of hiring undocumented workers to the plantations of the antebellum South. For *Art Rebate*, Avalos, Sisco and Hock took federal grant money they had received from the Museum of Contemporary Art in San Diego and the Centro Cultural de la Raza and distributed it in \$10 amounts to undocumented immigrants. Critics of

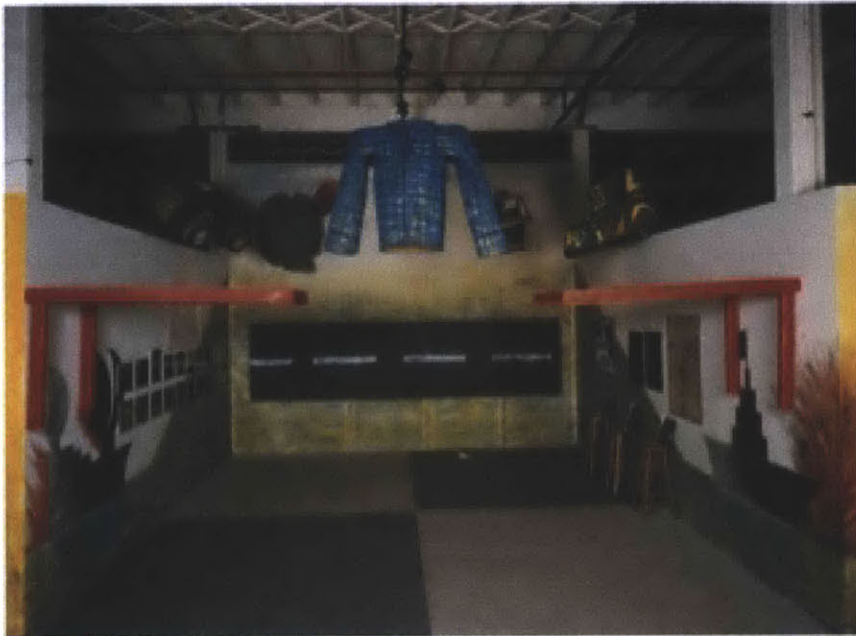


Figure 3-12: View of the *End of the Line* installation in the *Border Realities III* exhibition (1987). Image courtesy of David Avalos.

1989, the remaining BAW/TAF members conducted a vote, determining who would stay with the group. In this vote, Gómez-Peña, Hicks and Ochoa left amid a great deal of contention, leaving Schnorr as the last original member. Leaving aside the intrapersonal conflicts that contributed to the vote, it was clear that the BAW/TAF could not sustain such a number of outsized personalities and varying artistic inclinations.

Without doubt, dissolution of the original BAW/TAF marked a dramatic shift in its model of collectivity. During the first two phases, the individual personalities of the artists had been on constant display. Each artist worked in his or her preferred medium, with the contributions clearly labeled in shows such as the *Border Realities* series. By 1992, when Schnorr became the last remaining original member, the BAW/TAF's ranks were filled with younger artists and students from his classes at Southwestern College. Collectivity was now a mode of pedagogy, with Schnorr, the older professor, instructing the next generations in modes of political and social engagement.

the project claimed that Avalos was spending U.S. taxpayer money on so-called "illegals." Avalos intended for the project to illustrate the status of undocumented workers with regard to the tax law. These people pay sales, gas and other taxes, but have no access to the benefits provided to "legal" taxpayers.

This third phase of the BAW/TAF, what I term the “late” period, began when the group was invited to show at the 1992 Sydney Biennale. During that year, the BAW/TAF, led by Schnorr and Susan Yamagata, developed a strategy of bringing U.S.-Mexico border art beyond the region, using the lessons learned at the *frontera* to illuminate other international situations. This approach may seem similar to the first *Border Realities* show, which brought the politics of the border to San Francisco, but these later BAW/TAF projects were an exercise in practical application of art to solve local problems. This kind of “traveling” border is in many ways similar to the portable one I will describe in Chapter Four. Schnorr based this idea on the notion that knowledge can move from the periphery, the borderlands, to other regions, not necessarily the “center.”

The BAW/TAF’s first New York City show had taken place in 1989, at the Artists’ Space. According to Schnorr, the work in New York and its media attention “developed an awareness of the southern border that did not exist previously and the ‘popularity’ of even the word ‘border’ seems to follow....”⁸⁹ In his words:

We felt we had an opportunity to “crack” the N.Y. “shell” by demonstrating that the regional was in fact national/binational and international (pre-NAFTA) and that in fact there were issues that if correctly introduced would generate interest in the N.Y. Latino/Caribbean community as well as the easily converted art audience.⁹⁰

The “interest” he describes here is the spread of ideas from the border outwards. In this manner, the main issues of the border – migration, labor concerns, militarization – could resonate in different areas of the United States and with different populations, specifically the Puerto Rican/Dominican Latino community of New York City.

Schnorr described the utility of bringing the U.S.-Mexico border to other international regions:

... that’s the value that I’ve exploited all my life. If I dropped into Mogadishu or Kabul, I can do anything I want. I can be at a women’s conference filming

⁸⁹Schnorr, “Response to Carla Stellweg, University of Texas, Austin,” May-June 1997. From the BAW/TAF archives, Imperial Beach, CA and Chula Vista, CA.

⁹⁰Ibid, 1.

women without their veils and not get nailed. Why? Because you're the new kid on the block.⁹¹

Schnorr here asserts the value of the international border crosser. Under the guise of art and playing to the above-mentioned "easily converted art audience," the BAW/TAF could claim to enact change precisely because they were removed from local concerns and politics.⁹² This idea is a complete reversal of the essentialism espoused earlier in the group's history, which worked for the BAW/TAF in its interventions on the U.S.-Mexico border. Schnorr's borderless world, however, is complicated by the realities of the situation. Cuban art historian Gerardo Mosquera warns against buying into the "illusion of a transterritorial world,"

There has not been much progress in South-South and South-East (so to speak now that the East is beginning to leave the South) linking, other than economic recessions. Globalization has certainly improved communications to an extraordinary extent, has dynamized and pluralized cultural circulation, and has provided a more pluralist consciousness. Yet it has done so by following the very channels delineated by the economy, thus reproducing in good measure the structures of power.⁹³

Schnorr and the BAW/TAF, then, partake of worldwide opportunities precisely because they are familiar with the channels of funding and publicity. **The artists could use Biennial funds to subvert the system, as Schnorr claimed, but the fact remains that their identities guaranteed them their initial access to those funds. In a sense, this line of thought returns to the essentialism from which the BAW/TAF sought to distance itself.**

For the Sydney Biennial in 1992, the BAW/TAF completed a six-month residency and exhibited a show titled *Broken Promises: Cultural Value is Non-Negotiable*. Schnorr,

⁹¹Schnorr, Interview with the author (2009). With this statement, Schnorr refers specifically to a residency he undertook in Kabul, Afghanistan, in which he was able, as an outsider, to gain access to women-only functions. While asserting the role of the international artist, he reasserts the machismo inherent in much of U.S.-Mexico border art.

⁹²Change, in this sense, is relative. Whether helping to promote gender equality for Afghan women or promoting community on the U.S.-Mexico border, the BAW/TAF measured the success of their projects in terms of social action.

⁹³Gerardo Mosquera, "Walking with the Devil: Notes on Art, Culture and Internationalization" accessed March 27, 2011: <http://www.gdmoa.org/zhanlan/threeyear/4/24/12/12374.jsp>.

Yamagata and other BAW/TAF members could bring their border expertise to immigrant communities in Sydney. Following the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, over 100,000 Indochinese refugees came to Australia “without financial assets...depend[ing] initially on relatives, government services and welfare agencies within their own communities or on mainstream charity organizations... for general assistance with orientation, housing, clothing and used furniture after moving out from government migrant hostels.”⁹⁴ In 1992, after seventeen years of continuous immigration, many Australians feared the ghettoization of parts of New South Wales and Victoria.⁹⁵ While not enmeshed in the minutiae of Australian immigration debates, especially those concerned with Indo-Chinese refugees, the BAW/TAF could observe the situation from the outside and apply their previous experience to another, not-quite-analogous situation.

This collaborative project was intended to probe the ways by which “four elements: identity, memory, place and boundaries are cross-referenced between selected events of the cultural and political histories of Australia, the United States and Mexico.”⁹⁶ For the exhibition, the viewer would choose to enter through one of three doors, encountering the “elements” within through the perspective of an indigenous person, colonizer or immigrant. Working with refugees, as well as the Latino community in Sydney, enabled Schnorr and the BAW/TAF to draw comparisons between the U.S.-Mexico situation and that of Australia. The following year, the group exhibited the accompanying piece *Historias Portátiles/Portable Stories* at the Centro Cultural de la Raza in San Diego. Together, the goal of the two projects was to shatter the “myth of the mainstream,”⁹⁷ demonstrating the “otherness” inherent in everyone, regardless of origin or current location.

Following the Sydney Biennial, the BAW/TAF continued to work with the Indochinese community on the exhibition *Discoveries* (1993). Set up in a storefront rather than

⁹⁴“Indochinese Refugee Families in Australia: A Multicultural Perspective” *Cultural Diversity and the Family*, Vol 3 (Ashfield: Ethnic Affairs Commission of NSW, 1997), Accessed January 12, 2011: <http://members.ozemail.com.au/~yeulee/Other/indochinese%20refugees.html>.

⁹⁵See Katharine Betts, *Ideology and Immigration: Australia 1976-1987* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988).

⁹⁶Michael Schnorr, “Draft of Sydney Biennial Grant Proposal,” From the BAW/TAF archive, Imperial Beach, CA and Chula Vista, CA.

⁹⁷Leah Ollman, “Revealing some Untold Tales: Centro Displays Views from Outside the Mainstream” *The Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 1992.

a typical art venue, the exhibition took the form of a collaborative piece with Indochinese teenagers living in Sydney. Schnorr in particular assisted the young refugees in journeys of self-discovery, helping them to document the results through mixed media, collage and other forms of visual art.

... all of a sudden Melissa who I've worked with for almost five months brings in this newspaper clipping of the first time in the history of the world where the UN declared a person to be a person when they were born nowhere... On the raft over, Melissa was born and, when she arrives the first shot you see on the Herald Tribune, in Australia, when the first refugees arrive, is this little baby dressed up. The baby wasn't born anywhere. She doesn't belong to any country.⁹⁸

The Australian version of the *60 Minutes* news program aired interviews with Melissa and her mother, as well as the other *Discoveries* participants. Schnorr and the group members also spent five months touring the country and giving lectures on the subject of U.S.-Mexico border relations within the Australian context. From the Australian example, it is clear that the pedagogical model of the BAW/TAF was in full force.

With Sydney, Schnorr and the BAW/TAF used skills and tactics from the U.S.-Mexico border to create an art project for a different cultural setting. The use of several long-term projects, rather than a single artwork, allowed for a multilayered experience of the Australia-Indochina situation. By first illustrating the U.S.-Mexico border in *Broken Promises* and then drawing analogies between Mexican and Indochinese immigration, the BAW/TAF placed the Australians' anxieties into a global context. The U.S.-Mexico border, and the interventions of artists in particular, would provide a template for dialogue between Australian citizens and Indochinese refugees. Ideally, the dialogue would take the form of an exhibition such as *Discoveries*. That project not only assisted young refugees with expressing their histories through art, but also made these stories available to Australians outside the immigrant community. The end result was to foster intercultural dialogue where previously there had been only tension and mistrust. By the end of their time in Sydney,

⁹⁸Schnorr, Interview with the author (2009).

the BAW/TAF had implemented ideas from the U.S.-Mexico border while simultaneously developing new strategies to use in subsequent projects.

After Sydney, the BAW/TAF brought post-autonomous art-making back to the border. Here they engaged with the *poblado*, or land squat, called Maclovio Rojas, which had been a self-sustaining community on the outskirts of Tijuana since 1988.⁹⁹ Led by women and famous for its folk music, the community had come into conflict with the city government over the value of its land. The urgent need for land was due to Tijuana's rapid growth since the 1970s, which had been fueled by the construction of several pre-NAFTA *maquiladoras*. By the time of the conflict with the leaders of Maclovio Rojas, city authorities had already succeeded in siezing many *poblad*os from their occupants. The leaders of Maclovio Rojas cited a 1917 Agrarian Reform Law as proof of their rights as occupants, and in 1991, the Unión de Posesionarios of Poblado Maclovio Rojas officially paid for the land.¹⁰⁰ The purchase, however, did nothing to stop the continuing conflict between the state and city governments and the Maclovio Rojas *pobladores*. The artists of the BAW/TAF saw an opportunity to intervene in this simmering border situation.

In 1997, following their work with that year's InSite, Schnorr and the BAW/TAF proposed to build a cultural center in Maclovio Rojas, Centro Cultural Aguas Calientes, while assisting the community with their struggle for autonomy. Aguas Calientes (Hot Waters) comes from the name of the town where Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata joined together during the Mexican Revolution. Zapata was later taken as a figurehead for the Zapatista National Liberation Army (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*, EZLN).¹⁰¹ In 1994 the group's leader, Subcommandante Marcos, "called for cities all over Mexico to establish autonomous cultural centers that would not be controlled by municipal, state or federal governments."¹⁰² The BAW/TAF's Centro Cultural Aguas Calientes acted along

⁹⁹Manuel Rafael Mancillas, "Transborder Collaboration: The Dynamics of Grassroots Globalization," *Globalization on the Line: Culture, Capital and Citizenship at U.S. Borders*, ed. Claudia Sadowski-Smith (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 204-205. Mancillas recounts the full story of the poblado's founding in this chapter, as well as the origins of the name.

¹⁰⁰Ibid, 206. According to the agreement, the Unión paid approximately U.S. 1,892.78 for 197 hectares, which were, by 2002, valued at U.S. 197 million.

¹⁰¹I will discuss the EZLN at length in Chapter Four.

¹⁰²Marcos, quoted in El Campo RUSE, "Space for the Pobladores: Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo" *Public Art Review* (1999): 15.

these lines, proudly claiming its independence from Tijuana's city government.

Not only a center for the arts, the Aguascalientes project would establish a scholarly residency in the town, providing a space for visiting researchers to study and work with the *pobladores*. With this project, the BAW/TAF members used the experiences of the traveling border to inform their work; Schnorr specifically cited the projects in Australia and New York as “part of the formative process of learning how to initiate a project of this scope.”¹⁰³ In this way, the intervention at Maclovio Rojas and the construction of the cultural center represented a globally informed return to the border. At the same time that BAW/TAF artists brought the lessons of the region to other places around the world, the group members absorbed ideas and strategies from these locales. Maclovio Rojas proved to be a synthesis of an international outlook and politics on the ground.

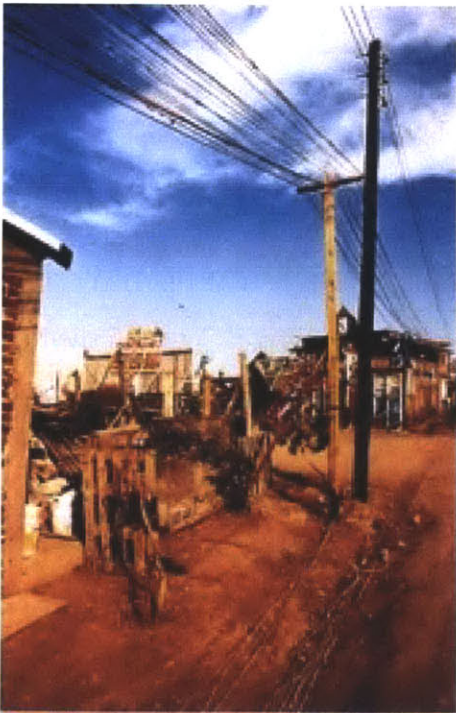


Figure 3-13: Maclovio Rojas, mid-1990s. Photo courtesy of Michael Schnorr.

The BAW/TAF used their earlier international experiences to assist with Maclovio

¹⁰³ “After thirteen years of work, the Border Art Workshop may have been leading up to creating this kind of space.” It is clear that Schnorr saw the Aguas Calientes Center as the culmination of their work on the U.S.-Mexico border. El Campo RUSE, “Space for the Pobladores: Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo” *Public Art Review* (1999): 16.

Rojas. From their work with the Indochinese community in Sydney, the group had learned effective strategies for engaging with an otherwise economically and socially closed-off population. In Sydney, the BAW/TAF had focused on the younger members of the community, those who would be better able to educate and influence the attitudes of their parents. Schnorr had also become sophisticated in dealing with the mainstream media, enlisting the help of *60 Minutes Australia* for the *Discoveries* project. While the BAW/TAF spent a six-month residency in Australia, the group dedicated years to the Maclovio settlement.¹⁰⁴ The Aguas Calientes project began with several surveys taken of the community, which preceded the artist-led construction of the cultural center. But the BAW/TAF continued assisting the community with infrastructural upgrades and cleanup projects. Schnorr, with the assistance of the American Friends Service Committee, sought donations of clothing, medical supplies, construction tarps and school supplies for the impoverished residents.¹⁰⁵ The group also became actively involved with protests against the municipal and state governments and encouraged the community to defend themselves without engaging in violent actions.¹⁰⁶

The BAW/TAF then displayed the results of this work at an exhibition, *Corridors of Power*, installed at their usual venue at San Diego's Centro Cultural de la Raza. Dismissed by the San Diego Union-Tribune's critic Neil Kendricks as "agit-prop," the exhibition presented fragments of the Maclovio Project, including painted garage doors depicting such images as the myth of San Llantero, "saint of the spare tires."¹⁰⁷ The critic's label of agit-prop reflected the U.S. art establishment's discomfort with explicitly political works,

¹⁰⁴Begun in 1996, the work in Maclovio Rojas has continued through the first decade of the twenty-first century. Michael Schnorr's involvement with the community led to his purchase of a home in the poblado and his marrying one of the residents.

¹⁰⁵Memorandum from Leticia Jimenez, American Friends Service Committee San Diego, to Tom Moore, Director Material Aids Program. "Aid for Border Community." September 1996. From the archives of the BAW/TAF, Imperial Beach, CA and Chula Vista, CA.

¹⁰⁶Schnorr, Interview with the author (2009).

¹⁰⁷Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo, "Letter to the Editor, San Diego Union-Tribune." March 16, 1998. From the BAW/TAF archive, Imperial Beach, CA and Chula Vista, CA. Garage doors had become a symbol of Maclovio Rojas. The poblado's dwellings were constructed out of old two-car garage doors, six doors per structure. Mexico had become a dumping ground for many unwanted American consumer products. Mexican border towns are home to numerous junkyards filled with cars, scrap metal and old tires, and many U.S.-based waste disposal companies sent their loaded trucks down to Mexico for dumping. The garage doors are one such ubiquitously dumped product. The BAW/TAF used the doors as shorthand for Maclovio Rojas and its particular mix of ingenuity and poverty (from Schnorr, interview with the author, 2009).

in particular this kind of community-based, non-object art. This is not to say that post-modernism in the United States lacked a political motivation, but that much of that was aimed towards critiquing the institutions of the art establishment. Especially in a city such as San Diego, far removed from the art world center, explicitly political art encountered much harsher resistance. In a way, Kendricks touched upon a valid criticism of such art, for how is one to assess the quality of an artwork that refuses to present itself as such?

Projects such as Maclovio Rojas and, to a lesser extent, the Sydney Biennial piece, are linked to Schnorr's adoption of the idea of post-autonomous art. The term is attributed to German conceptual artist Michael Lingner, who sketched out the concept in a 1992 symposium *Place, Position, Presentation, Public*.¹⁰⁸ Post-autonomous art, in Lingner's 1994 conceptualization, is a practice-based means to produce and comprehend social, cultural and political phenomena. Posed in contrast to "autonomous" art, or the "art for art's sake" ideal,¹⁰⁹ post-autonomous artists aimed to produce change rather than objects. This kind of art practice could not exist without a socio-political contextual framework, hence its avowed lack of autonomy.

It is unclear to what extent the BAW/TAF was familiar with Lingner or his work. For Schnorr and the BAW/TAF, post-autonomous art was both a significant contribution to art theory made by the group and one of its biggest problems. In Schnorr's exact words, the "biggest problem was and still is to get postmodern writers etc. to accept post-autonomous art making/practice as being the 'real' element of border art, at least as desired by [the] BAW/TAF from 1989 on to today."¹¹⁰ For the BAW/TAF, post-autonomy was linked to a desire for community engagement and the need to enact social change through artistic practice. While post-autonomous art does not fall into specific categories of medium or genre, the BAW/TAF used performance art to reproduce performative aspects of the U.S.-Mexico border. Performance proved an ideal medium for this post-autonomous project; categorizing the intervention in Maclovio Rojas as "performance art" meant that the objects on display in the exhibition were artifacts of the performance rather than art objects in their

¹⁰⁸Ine Gevers, *Place, Position, Presentation, Public* (Maastricht: Jan van Eyck Akademie, 1992).

¹⁰⁹Coined in the early 19th century by psychologist Victor Cousin in France and popularized as a slogan by critic Theophile Gautier.

¹¹⁰Schnorr, Response to Carla Stellweg (1997).

own right.

Given these objects exhibited in the Maclovio show, could the Border Art Workshop's post-autonomous art be considered a performance? To answer this question, we must consider just what the artwork entails, how the collective "staged" the Maclovio and Sydney installations. In most cases, as with the Sydney Biennial and the Maclovio Rojas projects, the BAW/TAF first worked with members of a specific nearby community, one clearly excluded from the "corridors of power." Schnorr and the other collaborators used the *idea* of an art piece, and the attention and funding it generates, to affect the lives of individuals in a permanent way. The cultural center would later be supported through grants and support from NGOs dedicated to improving the lives of border residents, as well as the continued personal involvement of Schnorr and the BAW/TAF. While manifestly a structure, Centro Cultural Aguascalientes serves also as a symbol of the *poblado's* autonomy – its separateness from Tijuana. When working with the migrants of Sydney, the BAW/TAF encouraged personal development and communal remembrance, creating a history that would otherwise have gone unwritten. For this kind of art, the physical, tangible object on view is merely a byproduct of the process.¹¹¹ The goal of these post-autonomous BAW/TAF projects was societal change on the level of the personal, the community and the region. This change is itself a redefined performance, one that takes place within the audience, rather than the artist.¹¹² Maclovio Rojas represents a kind of post-autonomous performance art, one in which the audience is not present at the performance itself.

Over its twenty-six year history, the BAW/TAF experimented with different modes of performing the border. Using the U.S.-Mexico region as their "laboratory" and their composition as a binational group serving as "scientists," the members worked to embody a complex situation. Rather than simplify the concept of "border" to easily digested terms, the BAW/TAF maintained a degree of complexity and capitalized on elements of confu-

¹¹¹Often, the documentation that resulted from these projects was needed for the grant or funding committee, and the BAW/TAF often informed the San Diego public of their work through exhibitions at the Centro Cultural de la Raza.

¹¹²There is a difference here between the intended art audience and the members of the affected community. In the case of Maclovio Rojas, for example, the performance takes place in the *poblado*, far from the gallery and with no spectators to observe the scene. Any exhibition of such a performance is simply a record of the proceedings. The intention of the BAW/TAF was to provoke physical change on the ground as well as in the minds of the viewing public after the fact.

sion and chaos within the context of the international border. Whether literal site-specific actions, the traveling border, installations that referred to an absent site that could no longer be “out of mind,” or the move towards post-autonomous art-making, the group expressed the concerns and needs of the U.S.-Mexico border region. From 1984 through 1989, the BAW/TAF worked primarily with the idea of site, bringing the border into their performances and installations as an active participant.

As the BAW/TAF matured in the 1990s, the artists mapped the U.S.-Mexico border problematic onto other global situations. Although Schnorr and the later group members did not engage with Gómez-Peña’s rhetoric of portability, it could still be said that they literally carried the border with them. Through the border’s travels to other regions and by bringing these ideas back to the Maclovio Rojas *poblado*, the group managed to enact change, but more importantly, their perception of the U.S.-Mexico situation changed as well. This altered perception would have a lasting effect on the BAW/TAF through their community-based interactions. It would be accurate to say that the Border Art Workshop, in returning to Maclovio Rojas and the U.S.-Mexico border region after 1994, brought a global knowledge of the art world and international migration to bear on a project so specific, so local, that its primary effect took place within a single community. It is worth noting, however, that in serving the *poblado*, the BAW/TAF affected far more than a small group of impoverished Mexicans. Through their community interactions, the group opened up a space on the border for artists to produce tangible social change.

Chapter 4

The Portable Border

*I have been seriously wounded in the multicultural wars of America and so have many of my beloved colleagues. The greatest casualty, though, has been the death of border art...*¹

After leaving the binational art collective Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronteriza in 1989, Guillermo Gómez-Peña published these words in the 1991 issue of the journal *High Performance*. The article, “Death on the Border: A Eulogy to Border Art” was controversial at the time, especially considering its tone towards the remaining BAW/TAF members. Gómez-Peña lamented the transformation of border art into “a specialized exercise in grant writing and institutional self-promotion.”² He also criticized border art’s newfound global focus, claiming that “instead of turning the margins into the center, it was bringing the center to the margins.”³ This binary view of the world failed to consider that in defining the borderlands as a locus for artistic production, artists could have bypassed the

¹Guillermo Gómez-Peña, “Death on the Border: A Eulogy to Border Art,” *High Performance* (Spring 1991): 8.

²Ibid, 9. With the mention of grant writing, Gómez-Peña refers to the BAW/TAF’s ability, starting in the late-1980s, to write successful grants. As BAW/TAF member Michael Schnorr said of the period “We couldn’t write a bad grant...” (From Michael Schnorr, Interview with the author, Chula Vista, CA, April 16, 2009).

³Ibid. This statement is a specific reaction to efforts by the Museum of Contemporary art to attract international artists to San Diego-Tijuana. The phenomenon of center moving to the periphery would be even more pronounced starting in 1992, with the establishment of InSite. Widespread global attention would not come to InSite until 1997, six years after Gómez-Peña’s *High Performance* article.

entire center/periphery model in favor of a rhizomatic, multi-nodal construct.⁴ According to Gómez-Peña, border art as it had been practiced was dead, no longer capable of generating new ideas about borders and international relations. This statement is both uncannily accurate, depicting the end of a programmatic approach to border performance developed during the 1980s, while at the same time misleading. **Border art did not die in 1991;** at the time, it was undergoing deeply rooted changes affecting the very definition of the category. Border artists including Gómez-Peña had broadened their outlook in anticipation of North American economic integration.

Gómez-Peña departed the BAW/TAF after the group experienced a series of internal conflicts. Members Emily Hicks, David Avalos, Isaac Artenstein, Richard Lou and Victor Ochoa also either resigned or were voted out from the collective, leaving Michael Schnorr and Susan Yamagata to recruit a new generation of BAW/TAF artists. The BAW/TAF was entering its third phase, marked by the movement of border ideas to other regions, and the globalization of ethnic identity was in full force. By this phrase, I am referring to how identity politics and the political structures supporting the concept had become widespread and standardized across developed nations. As I described in Chapter 3, Schnorr and the BAW/TAF were able to export their particular brand of border-crossing to such locations as Sydney, Australia among others. Rather than rehashing the internal politics of the Border Art Workshop, a task that extends beyond the confines of this study, I mention this conflict because of its relevance to the changing dynamics of border art at the start of the 1990s. Without the dissolution of the original BAW/TAF, it is very possible that border art could have developed along altogether different lines.

Border art, as defined by the BAW/TAF, had been confined to the U.S.-Mexico border region during the 1980s. With site-specific performances described in Chapter 3 such as *End of the Line* (1986), and the *Border Realities* series (1985-1987), the BAW/TAF came to represent politically motivated art based on the physical border and dedicated to addressing the social conditions of the region. In the early 1990s, two major events led to the expansion of border art. I refer to the 1992 Columbus Quincentennial and the resulting

⁴This shows that even though border art and artists claimed to have moved beyond traditional modes of Western thinking, the dominance of such thought was still very much an issue.

commodification of conquest, as well as the enactment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) two years later. These events brought intense focus on the contact zone of the border; epistemic shifts contributed to border art on a broader scale.

Rather than instantly spreading across the world, art and artists traveled to regions experiencing similar issues of cultural contact and migration. European nations such as Germany and France, as well as Canada, Australia and the U.S. interior were among the first places to embrace border art. Rather than retreating to the physicality of the border and reasserting the primacy of the region, artists insisted upon expanding the concept, bringing their art and the issues it addressed to the attention of those outside the art world. This portable border art would concern itself not only with regional politics and the immigration debate, but with large-scale international conflict, ethnic and cultural difference, and the social changes brought by late-twentieth century globalization.

Given a powerful impetus by the economics of NAFTA and the politics of Columbus Day, U.S.-Mexico border art and its constituent ideas became portable through a shift in thinking about international borders and their place in the postcolonial world. Rather than being grounded in the specifics of regional politics or concerned with enacting incremental change, as were the Chicano Movement and the BAW/TAF, this portable border addressed a broader audience. In doing so, border artists considered everyone to be a potential border dweller, regardless of physical location. For these artists, “the border” could be a state of mind as well as a boundary between nations; in the most extreme theorization, the border occurs wherever there are places of coexisting cultural or social difference.

Capping this development in 2000, Argentinean-born literary theorist Walter D. Mignolo elucidated his concept of “border thinking” – articulating the means by which knowledge moves from the borders of the world to the mainstream. Border thinking provides a framework from which to theorize the post-NAFTA developments in border art (and, indeed, this dissertation as a whole). I will examine two performance pieces that anticipated the epistemic shift to the portable border by performing it. Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco’s 1992 *Cage Performance: Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit...* marks the start of the shift to portability with a performance that consciously elaborates

borders between the artists and the audience. In more recent years, Gómez-Peña's group La Pocha Nostra has produced *Mapa Corpo* (2003-2009), a piece exploring the relationship between international conflict and borders, positioning the Iraq war as an exercise in human mapmaking. With this combination of border thinking and border mentality, the border became uprooted from its physical location while maintaining its connection to the body as a mythical site.

In order to apply border thinking to the U.S.-Mexico situation, it is necessary to understand how the term operates. According to Walter D. Mignolo, border thinking is the solution to the positioning of subject and object. In understanding borders or peripheries, the problem of objectivity arises. The theorist comes to the borderland from the outside, imposing his or her assumptions (produced from mainstream Western discourse). Here it is useful to quote again from Mignolo's formulation:

To describe in "reality" both sides of the border is not the problem. The problem is to do it from its exteriority. . . . The goal is to erase the distinction between the knower and the known, between a 'hybrid' object (the borderland as the known) and a "pure" disciplinary or interdisciplinary subject (the knower), uncontaminated by the border matters he or she describes. To change the terms of the conversation it is necessary to overcome the distinction between subject and object. . . and between epistemology and hermeneutics. . . . Border thinking should be the space in which this new logic could be thought out.⁵

In these terms, border thinking is the generation of knowledge *from* the borderland, rather than from an imagined exterior, looking at the region from a distant perspective.

While possible to discuss border thinking in terms of the center-periphery model (knowledge moving from the periphery to the center or, more commonly, from center to periphery describing the colonial world), one can also think of the system in terms of internal and external borders, as does Mignolo. This line of thinking allows us to bypass the entire center-periphery model and its problematic tendency to marginalize the boundaries. At the border, who is considered inside and who is outside? And who (or what) gets to make

⁵Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000), 18.

these determinations? Mignolo makes the point that one needs to validate the object (the known, the borderlands) by acknowledging that this place too is “knowing.” Through this transposition, essentialist categories become hybrid and productive.

It is important to note that Mignolo never refers to a specific border or even international boundaries as he develops his theory. In dealing with border thinking, the emphasis is towards members of previously unrecognized or underrepresented groups, those that force us to think outside the canon.⁶ I argue that border thinking can be taken a step further, that this theory can be used to reclassify physical borders and the effects they produce. Rather than a line dividing nations, the term “border” can be used to describe a state of being – border dweller, border milieu, or border mentality. If we break down these terms, we find that “border” operates in varying ways and with different levels of significance. It can mean, in the case of the border dweller, a mental state of the permanent outsider, of living between each nation but not belonging to either. For the term border milieu, “border” operates in an opposite manner, indicating which groups are inside the milieu and referring to a status that applies only to a certain few.

It is the term *border mentality*, however, that is most relevant to this discussion and leads to the concept of the portable border. Derived from border thinking, border mentality sees the entire world as comprised of layers of borders, ranging from the conventional (nation-states, religious or ethnic groups) to more nuanced expressions (psychological, social or economic). It is therefore impossible to determine who (or what) is outside versus inside. In fact, that very question becomes irrelevant. Rather than simply demarcating boundaries or spaces of difference, borders can serve as ties, uniting disparate populations into a single commonality: that of the border subject. In this formulation, we are all border subjects, constantly engaged in the act of obeying, crossing, or transgressing, established lines. In doing so, we often re-draw the borders, leading to a state of constant change (what others such as philosopher Etienne Balibar have termed “flows”).⁷

⁶For Mignolo, previously underrepresented groups include scholars and thinkers from Latin America, but this line of thinking includes postcolonial theorists and subaltern scholars as well.

⁷Etienne Balibar “The Borders of Europe”. in *Cosmopolitics: thinking and feeling beyond the nation*, eds. Peng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

When applied to modern and contemporary art, the border mentality is evident in the concept of the portable border that I have identified with Gómez-Peña's work of the 1990s. In art, this kind of portability has become a way to bring border art from the physical dividing line to other regions, from border dwellers to populations previously unconnected to the border. What does it mean to view the world as borders, and how is this manifested in the visual? Rather than in dividing the world into discrete periods and cultures, the border dweller visualizes the boundaries *within* these established categories. As a result, he or she can visualize new connections among previously disparate subjects.

By viewing the world as a series of borders, the artist is now able to make a commentary on subjects originally considered beyond the scope of border art. As was discussed in Chapter 3, in 1992 Michael Schnorr and the second generation of the BAW/TAF "exported" U.S.-Mexico border art to Sydney, Australia in a two-part process. Initially, the BAW/TAF proposed a project related to the U.S.-Mexico border, including the retelling of immigrant stories. Spurred on by the Southeast Asian refugee population of Sydney and finding a connection between their works and the migrant experiences, the BAW/TAF members extended the project to include the story of one such refugee. In this case, the portable border allowed for a connection between the U.S.-Mexico situation and that of Australia, a connection that only became evident through border thinking.

The concept of the portable border echoes Robert Smithson's elaboration of "non-site," as well as his numerous map projects and lost continents, among others. Smithson's work represents a key intermediary step in the discourse of site-specificity, from physically rooted works to a purely portable sited aesthetic. In 1979, Smithson wrote that "*The Non-Site (an indoor earthwork)* is a three dimensional logical picture that is *abstract*, yet it *represents* an actual site in N.J. (The Pine Barrens Plains). It is by this dimensional metaphor that one site can represent another site which does not resemble it – this is *The Non-Site*."⁸ Although Smithson's earthworks were materialized shards from quarries, fragments of breakwaters, chunks of scree and other rocks removed from their original location and transported to museums and galleries – the portable border acts along similar

⁸Robert Smithson quoted in Ann Reynolds, *Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 2003). 131.

lines. The artist creates a work (whether performance, installation, or other media) that is generated from the experience of a border. The work then travels – locally, nationally, internationally – and in doing so, serves as a *representation* of border thinking or border mentality.

Although the portable work is removed from the site, it still depends on the physical experience of the border for meaning. Through this process, the border, specifically the representation of the border in the gallery, becomes the non-site.

Let us say that one goes on a fictitious trip if one decides to go to the site of the *Non-Site*. The "trip" becomes invented, devised, artificial; therefore, one might call it a non-trip to a site from a Non-site. Once one arrives at the "airfield", one discovers that it is man-made in the shape of a hexagon, and that I mapped this site in terms of esthetic boundaries rather than political or economic boundaries.⁹

The relationship between site and non-site is a dialectical one that attempts to resolve the tension between representation and abstraction.¹⁰ The non-site is the synthesis of this dialectic, the meeting point between what exists at a given location and what has been removed.

With the non-trip, Smithson describes the act of rediscovering the original site. The journey is imaginary because the site becomes mythologized in the act of removing the earth and placing it on display as art. For the artist representing the portable border, the original site is imbued with a mythic quality – "The Border" and the entire history it represents. Simply by invoking the U.S.-Mexico border brings to mind a history of conflict, of lines drawn and redrawn, of early 20th century outlaws and present-day drug traffickers. Attempting to bring "The Border" back to the physical boundary line is, as Smithson would describe, a "non-trip."¹¹

⁹Robert Smithson: *The Collected Writings*, 2nd edition, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

¹⁰Susan Kandel, "The Non-Site of Theory" *Frieze* 22 (May 1995) Available online: http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/the_non_site_of_theory/

¹¹In practice, "non-trips" to Smithson's non-sites became pilgrimages for those connected with the art world. Smithson had used sites such as the New Jersey Pine Barrens and nearby rock quarries – locations



Figure 4-1: Robert Smithson, *A Non-site (Franklin, New Jersey)* 1968. Image online at <http://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/A-Nonsite--Franklin--New-Jersey-/8FOBA6C31COFE948>

With Smithson's establishment of the concept of the non-site in 1968,¹² art could be both portable and site-specific, a combination that had previously been a contradiction in terms. Smithson's ideas, however, remained applicable only to his earthworks – art that moved fragments away from a single site and into the artworld. With the development of the portable border in the early 1990s, site-specificity could now refer to works removed entirely from their physical location that could nonetheless continue to evoke their point of origin. With border art, that site is necessarily a border, whether international, mental, cultural or otherwise. The dual concepts of border mentality and the portable border allowed for an opening up of the category of border art beyond its traditional confines. The knowledge

that were far removed from the focus of other artists and art critics. In this way, Smithson inverted the relationship between the New York art world and its New Jersey boundaries (See Caroline Jones' chapter on Smithson in *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

¹²Although the Non-Site text was published in 1979, his Non-Site earthworks began in 1968.

generated from the border, as well as the collected history of its milieu, could flow across boundaries in the practice of portability. The lessons learned from the border can be applied now to the rest of the world.

At the start of the 1990s, artists began expanding the concept of the border in anticipation of two significant events. The 1992 Columbus Quincentennial and the 1994 enactment of NAFTA began to stretch the ideas of the border in different directions. In 1992, the United States commemorated the five hundred year anniversary of Columbus' 1492 landing in the New World. For many Latin Americans, however, the Quincentennial served to memorialize a centuries-long history of colonization and subjugation by European powers. Amid the sea of commemorative plates, t-shirts and other memorabilia emblazoned with Columbus' image, activists and revisionist historians attempted to explain the darker side of the "discovery." Spurred to action by the official celebrations surrounding the Quincentennial, dissenters succeeded in canceling a large number of events, including the replica tour that was to cross the United States.¹³

The decimation of the indigenous populations of the Americas, coupled with the centuries-long European exploitation of natural resources, had a lasting effect on the status of Latin America with respect to the Northern powers. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the U.S.-Mexico border is, in the words of feminist writer Gloria Anzaldúa, "*una herida abierta* [an open wound] where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds."¹⁴ She links the border with blood, evoking not only the conquest, but also the resulting tension between hybridity or miscegenation and the Spanish dictum of *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood).¹⁵ The Quincentennial opened further the debate surrounding colonialism, conquest and its place in Euro-American history. In effect, the border serves as the greatest reminder of this disparity, and in turn, of the original violence of conquest. This fact seems counterintuitive

¹³Coco Fusco, *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 38.

¹⁴Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands=La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999, originally published 1987), 25.

¹⁵The concept of *limpieza de sangre* led to the development of a very specific kind of painting in New Spain. These *casta* paintings were intended to illustrate the cultural mixtures that arose from different racial combinations. For example, Spanish + Indian = Mestizo, or Spanish + African = Mulatto. In a way, these *casta* paintings explored the cultural mixtures of the border long before the establishment of the physical line.

because of the U.S.-Mexico border's position between two previously colonized countries, but the economic disparity between the two, as well as the U.S. interventions in Mexico and the rest of Latin America, have cemented its role as an imperial power, at least in the Latin American psyche. The border stretches back through time, marking off the spaces of difference in the past as well as the physical line of today.

As noted above, the same year witnessed the beginning of the North American Free Trade Agreement on December 17, 1992. Signed by United States' President George H.W. Bush, Mexican President Carlos Salinas, and Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, NAFTA officially came into effect on January 1, 1994. The agreement's purpose was to lift non-tariff agricultural trade barriers between the United States, Mexico and Canada, with the remaining tariffs phased out over a period of fifteen years.¹⁶ Even prior to its implementation, NAFTA was the source of intense controversy. The agreement was marketed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) as a "win-win situation" for America's farmers.¹⁷ The Clinton Administration in 1993 stressed the importance of foreign engagement in general, of which NAFTA was to play a key role.¹⁸ From these stated goals of U.S. foreign policy, it was clear at the time that the trade agreement marked a crucial step on the path toward the integration of the North American markets. On the other hand, labor organizers in the United States and Mexico feared a collapse of national economies.¹⁹

On the day of NAFTA's enactment, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) took up arms in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas, denouncing the agreement's

¹⁶"NAFTA online" accessed March 25, 2009: <http://www.fas.usda.gov/itp/Policy/nafta/nafta.asp>

¹⁷Ibid. The site also contains studies published on the ten-year anniversary of NAFTA that support this optimistic premise. For more on the impact of NAFTA, see Gary Clyde Hufbauer and Jeffrey J. Schott, *NAFTA Revisited: achievements and challenges* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for International Economics, 2005) and also *International Migration: prospects and policies in a global market*, eds. Douglas S. Massey and J. Edward Taylor (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁸Anthony Lake, "From Containment to Enlargement" Address at the School for Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Washington D.C., September 21, 1993. Accessed March 20, 2009: <http://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?collection=journals&handle=hein.journals/dsptch9&div=118&id=&page=> His speech went on to stress the dangers of non-engagement, including a "rise in protectionism, unwise cuts to our military force structure or readiness, a loss of the resources necessary for our diplomacy – and thus the erosion of U.S. influence abroad."

¹⁹David Bacon, *Children of NAFTA: Labor Wars on the U.S./Mexico Border* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004).

marginalization of impoverished indigenous farmers.²⁰ Among their demands were free elections, the resignation of then-President Carlos Salinas (whose term was set to end in late 1994) and the cessation of violence against Indians. The Zapatistas timed their uprising to capitalize on and undermine the international attention garnered by NAFTA.

The Mexican government sent federal troops to combat the EZLN in January 1004, leading to an undetermined number of Zapatista deaths.²¹ By February, international attention and NGO involvement had lead to a ceasefire between the government and the Zapatistas.²² On the 21st of that month, EZLN leaders met with government representative Manuel Camacho in the Cathedral of San Cristobal to negotiate territorial concessions.²³ The peace lasted only a month; PRI presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio was assassinated on March 23rd, an event initially attributed to the EZLN.²⁴ In the years following the Chiapas uprising, Zapatista leaders directed their efforts towards presenting the EZLN as a viable political alternative to the established PRI and PAN political organizations. Almost a year later, Subcomandante Marcos would continue to decry the trade agreement in a December 1994 letter to newly-elected President Ernesto Zedillo:

it is also outrageous to learn that our national identity has been robbed within the “legal” process of a North American Free Trade Agreement which only means freedom for the powerful to rob and the freedom of misery for the dispossessed; it is outrageous now that the one who wears the Presidential sash does so . . . by the will of money and fear.²⁵

The trade agreement affected the lives of southern Mexican farmers more than any other sector of the economy, and by late 1994, NAFTA had already led to an overall weakening of Mexican agriculture.

²⁰Ibid, 19.

²¹Mihalis Mentinis, *Zapatistas: The Chiapas Revolt and What it Means for Radical Politics*, (Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2006), 9. The total number of deaths is estimated at 200 to 300, most of them Zapatistas. For a complete accounting of the Chiapas uprising, see also Niels Barmeyer, *Developing Zapatista Autonomy: Conflict and NGO Involvement in Rebel Chiapas* (Albuquerque NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2009).

²²Niels Barmeyer, *Developing Zapatista Autonomy: Conflict and NGO Involvement in Rebel Chiapas* (Albuquerque NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2009), 42-43.

²³Mentinis, *Zapatistas* (2006), 11-12.

²⁴Ibid, 13.

²⁵Subcomandante Marcos, “Letter to Ernesto Zedillo, December 1994” in *¡Ya Basta! Ten Years of the Zapatista Uprising: Writings of Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos*, ed. Ziga Vodovnik (Ljubljana: Studentska založba: 2004), 79.

During the buildup to NAFTA, border art, especially performance, anticipated its economic and social impact. Although the plan to enact NAFTA was public knowledge in 1992, the NAFTA-driven economic and social changes were not evident to the general public. Artists such as Gómez-Peña, Schnorr, and Fusco were in a position to analyze these proposed changes and anticipate their consequences through border performances. Artists working with the border increasingly employed notions of portability and globalism in relation to the border and previously regional concerns, knowing that NAFTA marked a significant movement toward internationalism and the putative dissolution of borders in the Western Hemisphere. As with the Columbus Quincentennial, the concept of border drastically expanded, but this time spatially, to other regions removed from any international boundary. After NAFTA, the Mexican state directed art promotion toward inserting younger, more experimental artists into the international art market, forging collaborations with U.S. foundations and the Mexican private sector, and promoting a more contemporary image of Mexican culture.²⁶

Gómez-Peña was deeply influenced by these early 1990s events. Despite his declaration of border art's demise, Gómez-Peña continued to make border art for a global art world audience, performances that evoked the U.S.-Mexico border and in fact capitalized on the artist's reputation as a border artist, but were situated in galleries and museums far from its physical location.²⁷ I would argue that the shift from site-specificity to the portable border was not complete until the definition of border changed accordingly. In the context of the Quincentennial, the artistic responses to its controversial status was central to artists Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña. The two collaborated on a 1992 performance that embodied the shift from site-specificity to portability.

Created in response to the oncoming Columbus Quincentennial, and intensely aware of the more integrated future promised by NAFTA, *Cage Performance: Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit...* reproduced cultural borders and explored their expansion. The performance consisted of Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco dressed in Western stereo-

²⁶Fusco, *English is Broken Here* (1995), 64. This statement holds true for all kinds of Mexican art, not just art that addresses the international border.

²⁷In 1991, Gómez-Peña earned the MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, becoming the first Mexican-born artist to receive the prestigious award.

types of “native” clothing and placed on display. Fusco “played scientific specimen and exotic curio with her face painted. . . her grass skirt, wig, sunglasses and tennis shoes.”²⁸ Gómez-Peña, bare-chested, wore a mask, sunglasses and black boots and carried a briefcase with a snake inside.²⁹ Each performance lasted three days, with Gómez-Peña and Fusco living in a golden cage in full view of the museum-going (or tourist) public.³⁰ This arrangement resulted in the conflation of the public with the private, the space of social interaction with the tropes of domestic life.

The piece traveled extensively to museums on three continents and in seven different cities, and (in a vestige of site-specificity) the title was amended each time to reflect the location. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the performance was that the couple in the cage was displayed in a parody of traditional ethnography. In most cases, the piece was not marketed as performance art, but as an exhibition of living history. Performance historian Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, challenged this assumption in a 1998 article:

To buy into this performance at face value, when one should know better, is to fail dramatically. To “play along” with its subversiveness. . . to act out the role of gullible viewer. . . is to test the moral limits of theatrical representation.³¹

Here, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett criticizes the notion that the audience was fooled into believing that the caged people actually were undiscovered Amerindians, much like the human exhibitions at the World’s Fairs of the late-19th and early 20th century. Equally suspect were the audience members who “played along” with the piece. To be “in on the joke” was to condemn historical modes of ethnography without a clear understanding of its contemporary practice. *Cage Performance* “min[ed] the popular ‘museums’ of [contemporary ethnography’s] repudiated ideas and procedures.”³²

²⁸Diana Taylor, “A Savage Performance: Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco’s ‘Couple in the Cage,’” *The Drama Review* 42 (Summer 1998): 165.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰The performance premiered in the Columbus Plaza in Madrid in May 1992, and went on to London’s Covent Garden, and later in Minneapolis and the Washington D.C. Museum of Natural History. In late 1992, the piece traveled to Sydney, Australia. In 1993, Gómez-Peña and Fusco brought *Cage Performance* to the Field Museum in Chicago and the Whitney Biennial. In late 1993, they were invited to bring the piece to Buenos Aires, Argentina. Fusco, *English is Broken Here* (1995), 2.

³¹Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “The Ethnographic Burlesque,” *The Drama Review* 42 (Summer 1998): 178.

³²Ibid.

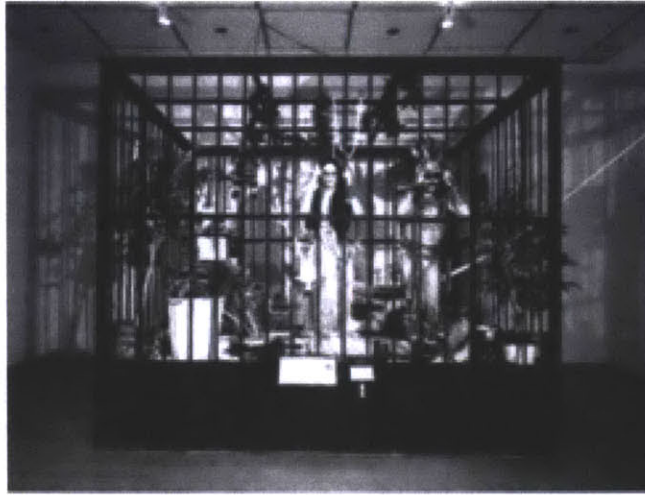


Figure 4-2: Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Cage Performance* (1992). Image available online at <http://english.emory.edu/Bahri/Fusco.html>

The specifics of *Cage Performance* are well documented by Coco Fusco in her 1994 essay “The Other History of Intercultural Performance.” As she describes:

We called our homeland Guatinau, and ourselves Guatinauis. We performed our “traditional tasks”, which ranged from sewing voodoo dolls and lifting weights to watching television and working on a laptop computer. . . .for a small fee, I would dance (to rap music) and Guillermo would tell authentic Amerindian stories (in a nonsensical language) and we would pose for Polaroids with visitors.³³

Fusco and Gómez-Peña emphasized the uncanny nature of the encounter. Visitors were not informed ahead of time of what to expect, and the result was an audience caught off-guard. The couple in the cage became a template for visitors, seemingly shocked by a return to the practice of exhibiting humans, to express their fears and anxieties of “the other.” In some cases, this expression turned from mere discomfort into acts of violence, notably an instance in Buenos Aires.³⁴ In her essay on the *Cage Performance*, Fusco described bystanders committing acts of aggression from shouting obscenities at the performers to a Buenos Aires viewer throwing acid on Gómez-Peña.³⁵

³³Fusco, *English is Broken Here* (1995), 39.

³⁴Ibid, 56.

³⁵Taylor, “A Savage Performance” (1998), 166.

The question of violence is an interesting one to discuss. It is not unprecedented for artworks to incite violence, whether a result of extreme anger or passion. Paintings by Pablo Picasso, Barnett Newman and Kazimir Malevich have been attacked in Amsterdam.³⁶ In the case of *Cage Performance*, the violence was directed against people rather than objects, the attacks were not against art or performance artists, but against the “other” and for all that he or she represents. In London, for example, an undercurrent of anti-immigrant sentiment would have fueled the incident, adding another dimension to the piece. The “undiscovered Amerindians” substituted for the African, South Asian, and other immigrants who populate much of London.

The full title of the piece, *Cage Performance: Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit... [Location]*, emphasized the word “undiscovered.” With this title, Fusco and Gómez-Peña implied that these are the people who somehow escaped Columbus, Cortes, Pizarro and the rest of the conquistadors. On the eve of the Quincentennial, the so-called “discovery” of America, the idea of remaining undiscovered is an act of defiance. Also significant is the verb *visit*, implying active participation in the exhibition. It is as if these undiscovered Amerindians have chosen to go on this particular tour, visiting a number of countries and museums around the globe. The verb “visit” stands in stark contrast to the visuals of the piece, with the two people caged – literally placed behind bars for the viewing pleasure (and supposed safety) of the audience.

According to Fusco, the goal of *Cage Performance* was to generate a “reverse ethnography,” published in a series of essays and a video documentary and focusing on the reactions of the audience rather than scrutiny of the supposed Amerindian people.³⁷ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, in analyzing the ethnographic shortcomings of *Cage Performance*, claims that while the piece “purports to rehearse a putative ethnographic reality, what it actually rehearses is a mode of encounter.”³⁸ This “mode of encounter,” rather than the ethnographic validity of the piece, is what marks *Cage Performance* as a precursor to the portable border. As a reverse ethnography, then, the piece falls short of providing a contemporary critique.

³⁶ “Picasso Painting Slashing Puts Museum Officials on Defensive” *Lawrence Journal*, Lawrence, KS, May 17, 1999.

³⁷ Fusco, *English is Broken Here* (1995), 57.

³⁸ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “The Ethnographic Burlesque” (1998), 176.



Figure 4-3: Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Cage Performance: Two Undiscovered Amerindians visit Madrid* (1992). This image illustrates the interactions of artists and audience. Image available online at <http://lasvegascac.blogspot.com/>

The cage, with its “indigenous” inhabitants, is so rooted to a specific period of history that it cannot generate contemporary cultural critique. The performance does, however, bring an exaggerated version of cultural encounter to the late twentieth century, reproducing borders between artists and audience, history and contemporaneity, the vision of a pristine indigenous past and the reality of an integrated present.

This boundary between artist and audience had been previously theorized in performance studies, especially the “in-betweenness” of performance, as a transition between

two states of more settled or more conventional cultural activity.³⁹ The border I describe serves as more than just the boundary between the action on the stage and those passively viewing it; rather, this border urges the interaction between the two groups, encouraging transgression and crossing. The performance here was not simply a set piece to be viewed passively, but a conversation between the artists and the audience. In doing so, the audience determined the specifics of the performance, as well as the interpretation. When the viewers were unaware of the artistic nature of this spectacle (as in Madrid), it took on an entirely different dimension than when it was prominently displayed as an artwork (at the Whitney Museum, for instance).

For *Cage Performance*, border crossing is not physical; the golden cage separates the audience from the performers. Here the border is crossed through acts of communication and identification with the supposedly indigenous subjects, and also the “otherness” within each viewer. As has been theorized by Edward Saïd, Timothy Mitchell and countless other scholars, the encounter with the “other” exposes and reveals more about the dominant culture than the one on display.⁴⁰ This idea held true in the case of the *Cage Performance*. Public interaction with the “undiscovered Amerindians” lowered viewers’ inhibitions, revealing the strange, the alien, and the other within themselves. While not initially recognizable as border art, *Cage Performance* was, I argue, the first physical embodiment of the portable border, and it would be followed by the further globalization of border art.⁴¹

After *Cage Performance*, Gómez-Peña went on to collaborate with other artists, eventually forming a troupe, *La Pocha Nostra*. The name is a play on the Sicilian Mafia’s “La Cosa Nostra,”⁴² substituting the word “Pocha,” a slang term for artificial whiteness. Pocha can mean “bleached,” indicating a intentional whiteness expressed by an attitude – a “Pocho” is either clueless about Latino culture and social norms or purports to exist above

³⁹Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

⁴⁰For a thorough treatment of this subject, see Edward Saïd, *Orientalism* (1978) and Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (1988).

⁴¹It is important to note that my observations are based on the substantial documentary evidence from the performance, including Coco Fusco’s writings on the piece, the subsequent 1992 film *The Year of the White Bear* and the extensive press coverage it received. The amount of documentation in itself is a product of the border’s globalization – the international reach of the performance and the widespread attention it generated.

⁴²La Cosa Nostra literally translates to “our thing” or “this thing of ours” indicating the secrecy inherent to the Sicilian Mafia.

them. The name La Pocha Nostra refers to both, indicating an ownership of this condition from both sides. Other permanent members of the troupe included Roberto Sifuentes, Gómez-Peña's longtime collaborator, artist-actress Violeta Luna, and dancer/artist Michéle Ceballos. The rest of La Pocha Nostra's roster is constantly changing (under Gómez-Peña's constant leadership), with an influx of international artists joining the troupe for specific performances.

The group's stated goal was to "provide a base [and forum] for a loose network of rebel artists from various disciplines, generations and ethnic backgrounds."⁴³ With the changing landscape of the U.S.-Mexico border and its relevance to other border situations around the globe, La Pocha Nostra began to take border art further. Art had become a means to comment on broad ranging issues such as neocolonialism, international migration and the state of the immigrant/refugee, and the dynamics of integrated global economies. As a result, border art moved away from the specifics of the U.S.-Mexico border, where it would resonate with those exposed to the situation, and towards a more universal kind of symbolism.

At first, La Pocha Nostra's 2003 performance, *Mapa Corpo* ("body map") seems completely distant from the border and the category of "border art." The piece is a complex take on United States foreign policy and twenty-first century colonialism. Rather than focusing primarily on the boundaries between nations, *Mapa Corpo* brought attention to the transgression of these same boundaries. In its various iterations from 2003 through 2009, this performance has explored an idea of "border" made possible only by the increasing portability of border art. I would argue that *Mapa Corpo* is the twenty-first century culmination of the portable border – its evolution into a global, multi-ethnic (and pan-regional) border. With this performance, Gómez-Peña and La Pocha Nostra used the knowledge and strategies generated from U.S.-Mexico border art to make an effective socio-political statement about the nature of international borders, their violation, and their internalization.

Starting in 2003 at the Tate Modern in London, *Mapa Corpo* traveled throughout Europe, including art museums and international art festivals in Germany, Norway, and

⁴³"Pocha Nostra mission statement," accessed March 1, 2009: <http://www.pochanostra.com/what/>

Switzerland. It is telling that the piece only later traveled to Latin America.⁴⁴ For *Mapa Corpo*, Gómez-Peña, dressed as a shaman, spoke incantations in an imaginary language over a nude woman.⁴⁵ An acupuncturist worked on the woman's body, pressing needles adorned with national flags into her flesh. The flags represented the coalition of nations taking part in the Iraq invasion, and the locations corresponded to traditional sites for acupuncture treatment. The proportion of flags of a specific country was directly related to its participation in the war, with the United States representing the largest number of flags. After the acupuncture was complete, the audience was then invited to "decolonize" the body by removing the flags, one at a time. Simultaneously, artist Roberto Sifuentes posed as an injured soldier, held in a *pieta* pose by a grieving woman.

In comparing colonization with acupuncture, *Mapa Corpo* interrogated the nature of both. Gómez-Peña described the piece as "a response to the invasion of Iraq... [utilizing] political acupuncture as a metaphor. The nude body as territory, and the needles, 40 needles with varying flags of the occupational forces. The operation by an acupuncturist, and then inviting the audience to extract the flags from the body map."⁴⁶ This concept of political acupuncture deserves further inspection – what does the action signify? The acupuncturist, usually played by a troupe member (or occasionally a curator) colonized the body through flags. Although the intention of the practice is healing, in *Mapa Corpo* the acupuncture took on a darker role. Rather than alleviating pain or other ailments, the acupuncturist *inflicted* pain by piercing the woman's skin. This dual pain infliction/alleviation is inherent to acupuncture, and recalls the U.S. government's explanation of the war; namely, that in order to heal or resolve territorial conflict, it is necessary to inflict pain or destruction. Acupuncture served as a metaphor for the collateral damage expected from conflict, damage that is suffered by the conquered territory rather than the colonizer. Under the guise of

⁴⁴Gómez-Peña, though born in Mexico, has gained a much higher status in the United States and Western Europe. His criticism of U.S. intervention in the Middle East, then, was a critique not only of U.S. foreign policy, but of the society in which he had come to prominence as an artist.

⁴⁵The nude woman was played, on a rotating basis, by female members of La Pocha Nostra. Occasionally an actress would be hired to play the role when troupe members were unavailable or unable to perform. (From Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Interview with the author, San Francisco, CA, March 23, 2009).

⁴⁶Gómez-Peña, Interview with the author (2009). For more of Gómez-Peña's writings on art and borders, see his *The New World Border: Prophecies, Poems and Loqueras for the End of the Century* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1996) and *Ethno-techno: Writings on performance, activism, and pedagogy* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

intervening in international conflicts or aiding repressed groups, the present-day colonizer substitutes one regime for another; nothing is gained in the process.

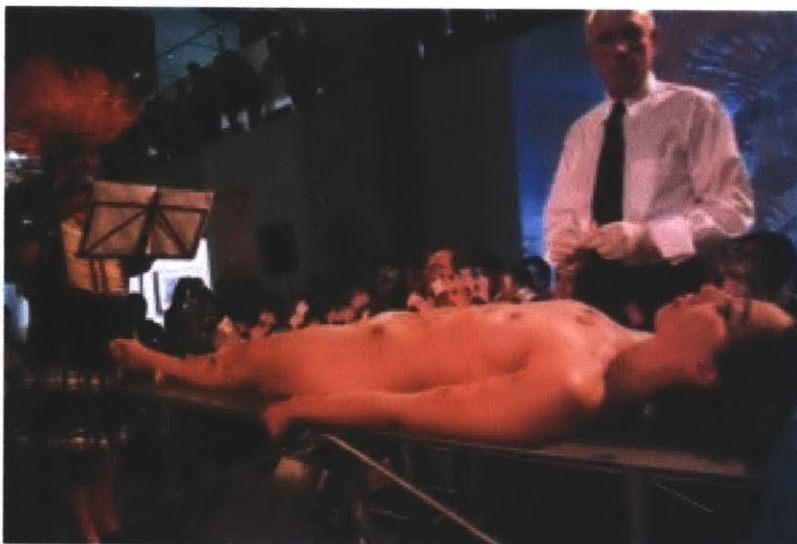


Figure 4-4: La Pocha Nostra, *Mapa Corpo* (2003). Image available online at <http://www.atasite.org/zine/issue5/tactics.html>

In keeping with the acupunctural theme, the piece was intentionally dark. Gómez-Peña and La Pocha Nostra attempted to capture the post-9/11 mood in the United States and abroad. At the start of the Iraq war, *Mapa Corpo* portended the violence to come, even as official forecasts for the invasion projected instant victory. The use of a female body is itself a statement. Here, land (nation) is feminized, as in the common trope of the “motherland.”⁴⁷ It is telling, however, that *Mapa Corpo*’s feminine map is purposely androgynous. Pocha Nostra members Violeta Luna and Lorena Rivero de Beer played the nude woman on a rotating basis; both were chosen for their androgynous features. The few times an outside model was contracted to perform, the occasional voluptuous woman was hired. In these cases, the focus of the piece shifted, as the “body map” charted a sexual topography rather than a colonial geography. It is possible that through the conscious choice of an androgynous female body, Gómez-Peña was attempting to subvert his own machismo, and that of Latin America in general.

⁴⁷The word “motherland” comes from the Russian Rodina. The word is also the name given to the super-continent that formed before Pangaea. The trope of “motherland” has come to have particular connotations with Soviet and Chinese Communist propaganda in the mid-twentieth century.

In developing this performance, the Pocha Nostra members considered the sexual politics of the nude female, and the resulting image is intended to shock. The shock value here is not necessarily the nude female body, a trope that has been explored thoroughly in performance art, from Carolee Schneeman to Ana Mendieta. The intended shock, or rather, the source of the audience's unease, is the relationship between the acupuncturist and the nude woman. The audience bears witness to her vulnerability, and, as they are invited to "decolonize" her, they do so out of empathy.

According to Gómez-Peña, "the thoughts behind the image, the territories – national territories – maps, have been feminized for centuries. . . . So we were basically utilizing a kind of expedient metaphor."⁴⁸ While it might have been "expedient," Gómez-Peña, Luna, Sifuentes and the rest of La Pocha Nostra engaged with the feminization of the map beyond simply utilizing a metaphor. Maps, and especially territory, have been personified as female across cultures. The following image, a map by the fourteenth century Protestant theologian Heinrich Bünting, depicts the continent of Europe as a queen. The trope of giving European maps female form had been in place since the early fourteenth century, relating to the mythological "Europa," carried off and raped by Zeus (in the form of a white bull). The connection with the female map and rape is one that *Mapa Corpo* mines in the context of war. In the 2003 performance, the female map is the site of conquest, territorial ambition and conflict – her body becomes a battleground for the coalition forces.

In *Mapa Corpo*, the woman is a dynamic map, breathing and even changing from performance to performance. This concept of mapping also invokes a centuries-long history of human territoriality and border control. Although initially equated with religious worldviews, by the fifteenth century, maps had become inextricably linked with empire. Originally, the very act of mapping a newly-"discovered" territory was ground enough for claiming it as one's own. According to cartographic historian J. B. Harley, maps "redescribe the world in terms of relations of power and of cultural practices, preferences and priorities." The surveyor "whether consciously or otherwise, replicates not just the 'environment' in some abstract sense but equally the territorial imperatives of a particular political sys-

⁴⁸Gómez-Peña, Interview with the author (2009).

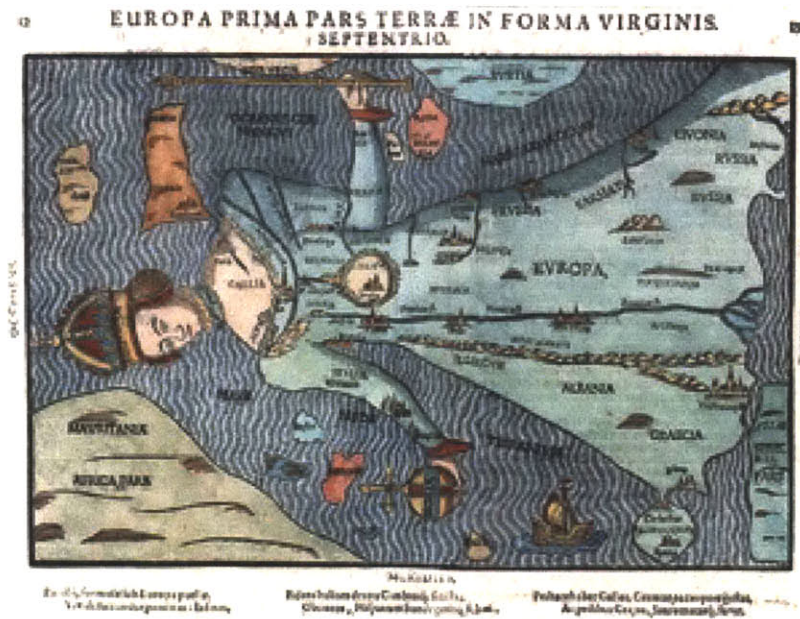


Figure 4-5: Heinrich Bünting. *Europa Prima Pars Terrae In Forma Virginis* (1581). Image available online at <http://www.raremaps.com/gallery/detail/21632?view=print>

tem.” In this context, maps and politics are inseparable, for maps were used to “legitimize the reality of conquest and empire” in a manner unlike anything else available to early imperial powers.⁴⁹ Even standardized map projections present a highly subjective view of the world. The commonly used Mercator projection, for example, distributes landmasses unevenly at the poles, rendering Alaska and Northern Europe much larger in proportion to South America. Even the standard North-South orientation is a Eurocentric convention. So-called “corrective” maps attempt to erase this bias.⁵⁰

The ways by which newly conquered territories were visualized in maps provides a glimpse into the rationale behind this form of territorial control. In particular, the Spanish empire’s obsession with mapping the New World in the 16th century was in part an attempt to standardize the calculating of longitude, as evidenced by a series of questionnaires sent to colonial subjects, asking them to indicate the position of the moon at a specific time on a certain night. Colonial viceroys were also asked to provide demographic data and

⁴⁹J.B. Harley, *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography*. Paul Laxton, ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

⁵⁰Robert Osserman, *Poetry of the Universe: A Mathematical Exploration of the Cosmos* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 29-34.

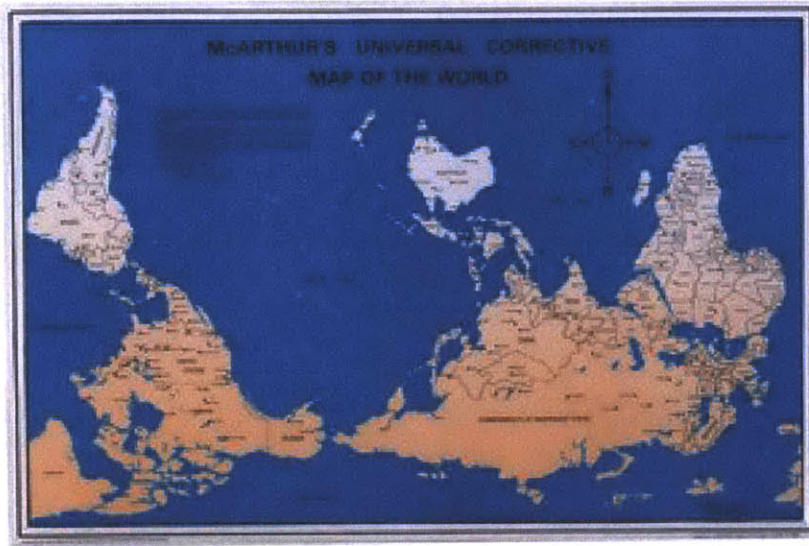


Figure 4-6: McArthur's Universal Corrective Map of the World (1979). Made by an Australian, this was the first widely published "south-up" world map. Image available online at <http://flourish.org/upsidedownmap/>

information on the indigenous peoples in the form of maps and geographical surveys.⁵¹ The results of the survey, called the *Relaciones Geográficas*, were a series of hand-drawn maps from New Spain, most of which were drawn by indigenous people. The most well-known of these maps, a rendering of the Mixtec-speaking city of Teozacoalco, presented the city in a spherical form, with Mixtec royal genealogies represented on the left-hand side.⁵²

Of great significance was the connection of spatial mapping with human subjects, whether represented by genealogic codes or images of the human form. For many of the indigenous cultures of New Spain, boundaries were defined by human presence. In many cases, members of a tribe or village would walk the borders of their territory in order to claim the space.⁵³ Pre-Columbian maps, such as this example from the *Codex Zouche-Nuttall*, show a clear emphasis on the human form as a representation of space and natural

⁵¹Barbara E. Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain: Indigenous Cartography and the Maps of the Relaciones Geográficas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). Mapping by questionnaire was one way to extend the long arm of empire to the territories, but it proved a dismal failure at actually characterizing the New World. The data were a function of the reliability of the particular viceroy or official entrusted with the task rather than an accurate depiction of the conditions "on the ground." More insidiously, mapping programs also contributed to the physical eradication and historical erasure of indigenous populations. See also John Pickles, *A History of Spaces: cartographic reason, mapping and the geo-coded world* (2004).

⁵²Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain* (1996) 26.

⁵³Ibid, 111



Figure 4-7: *Relación Geográfica* map of Teozacoalco (1580). Image from Barbara E. Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain: Indigenous Cartography and the Maps of the Relaciones Geográficas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

boundaries.⁵⁴

Returning to *Mapa Corpo*, it is clear that the artists drew on a long and complex history of female and body-centric maps, one that spanned Europe, New Spain and pre-Columbian civilizations. In presenting the map as a female body, Gómez-Peña and La Pocha Nostra return to pre-standardized ways of mapping. Long before satellite imagery or even the Mercator projection, cartography was a space where the human imagination could play out fantasies of colonization and conquest.

More than simply the traditional metaphor of female map/motherland, *Mapa Corpo* brought together cartographic history, Chinese traditional medicine, and U.S. colonial actions. The colonization of the body evokes sexual violence while avoiding the depiction of conflict. The acupuncturist (coalition forces) not only colonizes the woman's body, but these actions meet no opposition. In the world of *Mapa Corpo*, colonial powers encounter no resistance, simply flesh that yields to the touch of a needle. The metaphor can be taken

⁵⁴Ibid, 102. The image here depicts geographic features in the Apoala Valley, including the "deep cave of the serpent." A highly codified visual language defines other natural features such as rivers and plains. For a complete explanation of this map, see Mundy's analysis on pages 102-104 of *The Mapping of New Spain*.



Figure 4-8: Topographical map from the *Codex Zouche-Nuttall* (c. 14th century). Image from Barbara E. Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain: Indigenous Cartography and the Maps of the Relaciones Geográficas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

further to emphasize the toll that war has on the civilian population, especially in twenty-first century conflicts when the battle lines are not clearly drawn. Rather than a soldier on the table, or even simply a male figure, the nude woman evokes vulnerability in the face of war. Women are also frequently the reason or justification of war. From Helen of Troy to the nameless oppressed women of fundamentalist Islamic regimes, the feminine has literally constituted the territory for which war has been fought.

In 2003, when *Mapa Corpo* was initially developed, the Iraq war was in its infancy, and support for the invasion was high in the United States and coalition nations. As a result, the U.S. art establishment largely passed on the piece when it was proposed.⁵⁵ Gómez-Peña, angered by the apparent rejection of the piece in the United States, expressed his frustration in an essay entitled “Disclaimer.” Later published in an issue of *The Drama Review* (2006), the piece was a raw, emotional rant directed at the art establishment in the United States.

The air has become extremely rarefied. The continuous defunding of the arts,

⁵⁵Guillermo Gómez-Peña, “Disclaimer” *The Drama Review* Vol. 50, No. 1 (Spring 2006).

paired with institutionalized neoconservatism and the imposed culture of panic, prohibition, and high security permeating every corner of society—including our arts organizations—has created an incendiary environment for the production of critical culture, and generated a growing unemployed (or rather “under-employed”) class: the “radical” experimental artist.⁵⁶

It is important to note that this is Gómez-Peña’s personal characterization of the situation, an outlet for his frustration during the early part of the Iraq War. It is more likely that *Mapa Corpo*, while touching a popular nerve in certain audiences, was not the most aesthetically innovative critique of the war.

Despite the controversy, or perhaps because of it, *Mapa Corpo* was extremely popular outside of the United States. Audiences in Europe embraced Gómez-Peña and his commentary on international borders. By traveling internationally and intercontinentally over a three-year period, *Mapa Corpo* embodied the concept of the portable border. From 2003 to 2005, La Pocha Nostra performed *Mapa Corpo* in Mexico and other parts of Latin America, Europe and Canada. Venues included festivals in Mexico City and Brazil. The U.S.-based resistance to the piece did not last long. By late 2004, venues in the United States began to invite the Pocha Nostra performance, and the troupe brought *Mapa Corpo* to Los Angeles (LACMA) and New York (Guggenheim).

According to Gómez-Peña, the social and political situation in the United States eventually led to *Mapa Corpo*’s acceptance. By 2005, the political climate in the United States had changed quite drastically. After the prolonged conflict in Iraq and the Bush administration’s handling of Hurricane Katrina’s aftermath, protest and criticism of U.S. administration became commonplace. The socio-political shift, coupled with *Mapa Corpo*’s success in Europe, led to requests for performances at U.S. art institutions. By the end of 2004, Gómez-Peña and La Pocha Nostra had begun to perform the piece at museums and galleries around the United States. The performance became a literal border crosser, moving around the globe and finally returning to the United States, where (and for which) it had originally been conceived.

The 2005 version of the piece included a second station:

⁵⁶Ibid, 151.

... the international immigrant, which was a brown man, nude, whose body would be prepared by either a witch or a curator. And the preparation ritual entailed washing him, shaving him...engaging in a kind of exorcism. ... In the last part of the show, we would invite the audience to re-colonize his body with statements, with literature, with the poetics of hope, we would give them pencils, crayons and lipstick to write on his body and turn him into a kind of book of border poetry.⁵⁷

This part of the performance was added in response to the earlier controversy over the piece's Iraq war content. The immigrant station also served as an attempt to add another dimension to the piece, broadening its reach to address contemporary boundary concerns. As with the nude female body, the audience acts upon the man. Rather than removing flags from his body and decolonizing, the audience was invited to *recolonize* by writing on his skin. In the language of the body map, the nude man becomes a map for the public's thoughts, fears and hopes. Had the genders of the figures been reversed, the message would have been vastly different. The international immigrant is first stripped, and then "exorcised" of the past and of previous relationships. This action is meant to relate to the undocumented immigrant experience, particularly from Mexico into the United States, when the illegal border-crosser loses his or her history and identity in the desert crossing. Finally, he emerges only to be re-colonized through his labor by the country he has fought so hard to enter.⁵⁸

I argue that, given these associations, both versions of *Mapa Corpo* present a twenty-first century embodiment of the border art concept adapted for a global age. This development is an extension of the portable border, connected as it was by the artist to the United States's act of border crossing in Iraq. Gómez-Peña's *Mapa Corpo* performance dramatized border thinking, clarifying metaphorically how the U.S. crossed several boundaries: the physical line separating Iraq from the rest of the world, the line between diplomacy and conflict, and the line dividing the United States from its strongest allies. *Mapa Corpo*

⁵⁷Gómez-Peña, interview with the author (2009). One could argue that inviting audience members to write on the body of the "international immigrant" is just as demeaning as the reality of twenty-first century immigration.

⁵⁸As I described earlier in the introduction and Chapter 2, undocumented workers in homes, fields, factories and slaughterhouses across the United States constitute not just an underclass; one could speak in terms of invisible labor, and even the rhetoric of the caste system is not out of place in this context.



Figure 4-9: La Pocha Nostra, scenes from *Mapa Corpo II*, including Gómez-Peña's shaman, Violeta Luna as a victim of interrogation, and the "international immigrant" station (2005). Images from <http://www.prognosen-ueber-bewegungen.de/en/wise-guys-of-movement/guillermo-gomez-pe-a/>

restaged the Iraq war as a border conflict, one that links military aggression to the trauma of colonization – the instigation for Latin American “border thinking.”

Borders are evoked with figure of the shaman, presiding over the performance, Gómez-Peña had utilized this trope frequently to represent borders. Initially a denizen of the physical U.S.-Mexico border, the shaman/brujo figure had evolved to embody the multi-ethnic portable border. Originally, the word “shaman” comes from the Tungus language of central Siberia. Incorporating “sa,” the Tungus word for “knowledge,” *sa-man* indicated an extremely knowledgeable person.⁵⁹ Shamanism, or aspects thereof, is found in religions around the world, including tribes of Central and South America. In Colombia, the role of the shaman was the “curing of disease, obtaining of game animals, and fish from their supernatural masters, the presiding over the rituals in the individual life cycle, and defensive or aggressive action against personal enemies.”⁶⁰ Shamanism has also been a persistent trope in performance art, from Joseph Beuys’ *I Like America and America Likes Me* (1974) to Nam June Paik’s 1991 ritual performance in Beuys’ memory. For *Mapa Corpo*, as well as earlier phases of his career, Gómez-Peña certainly drew on the associations between shamanism, performance art, and Fluxus (Paik). The ritual, memorial and defen-

⁵⁹Alice Beck Kehoe, *Shamans and Religion: an Anthropological Exploration in Critical Thinking* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 2000).

⁶⁰G. Reichel-Dolmatoff, *The Shaman and the Jaguar: a Study of Narcotic Drugs Among the Indians of Colombia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1975), 76.

sive aspects of the shaman pervaded the performance, as he presided over the acupuncture ceremony.

Mapa Corpo's shaman speaks in multiple languages, including several imaginary tongues. Performed by Gómez-Peña himself, the shaman is the ringmaster of the event, connecting the audience, the performers, and the nebulous "other." He is at once frightening, clothed as a witch doctor, yet firmly in control, directing the action and supposedly communing with the divine. Gómez-Peña's shaman looks back to an earlier performance, one that had come to define border art. In 1989's *Border Brujo* (Border Magician) he created an archetypal figure that came to represent international border-crossers. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Brujo assumes many forms, including those of a *Pachuco*, Native American, broadcast journalist and a drunken, sombrero-clad Mexican. Vacillating between inhabiting stereotypes and producing a more subtle ironic commentary, Gómez-Peña's 1989 performance physically embodied a kind of U.S.-Mexico border thinking.

Giving human form to the border region via the shaman is work of a distinctly anthropological nature. Gómez-Peña has often called his work "reverse anthropology,"⁶¹ a term similar to Mignolo's "border thinking," in which the artist assumes a central position, forcing the dominant culture to the margins. Gómez-Peña's categorizing of border characters has been explored and echoed by others. Social anthropologists have categorized border crossers and dwellers into a variety of types. Five years after *Border Brujo*, Oscar Martínez, in his 1994 book *Border People: Life and Society in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*, presented a taxonomy of each distinct category, from the relocated Anglo retiree to the transient migrant Mexican.⁶² In Martínez' study, however, the border types fall along specific lines according to their degree of hybridity. For Gómez-Peña and La Pocha Nostra, the reality of the border is far more fluid and the categories are constantly shifting; creating a standard taxonomy is impossible.

⁶¹Daniel Belgrad, "Performing Lo Chicano," *MELUS* 29 (Summer 2004): 253. This term could be seen as an extension of the "reverse ethnography" described by Coco Fusco in relation to the *Cage Performance*.

⁶²Oscar J. Martínez, *Border People: Life and Society in the US-Mexico Borderlands*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994), 67-83. Although Gómez-Peña never specifically cites Martínez in his work, his interest in generating a reverse anthropology indicates that he was most likely aware of this research and others like it. For more of Martínez' border research, including the impact of industrialization the Mexican side, see his *Border Boom Town: Ciudad Juarez since 1848* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975).

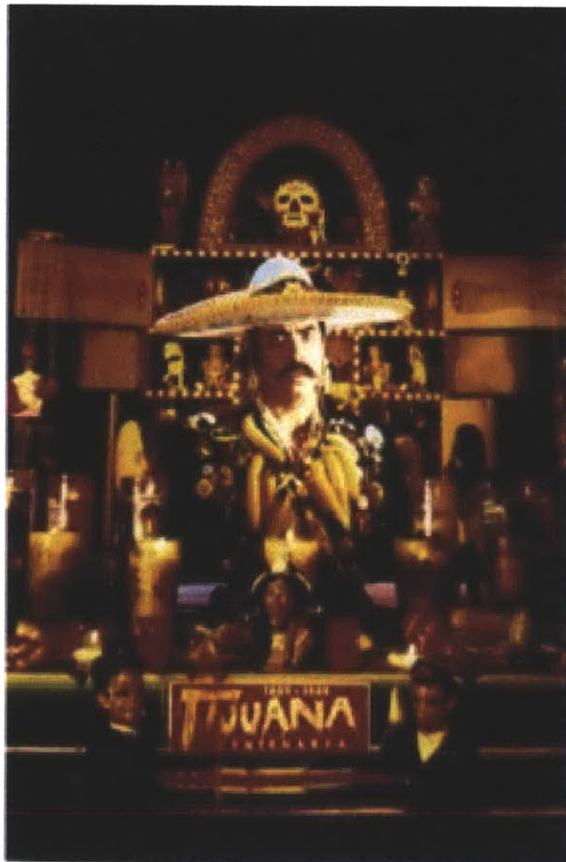


Figure 4-10: Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Border Brujo* (1989). Image online at <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~lats41/kerb/gallery/exhibitions.html>

Gómez-Peña's shaman, incorporating an entire encyclopedia of border hybrids, has been transported from 1989 to 2003, from *Border Brujo* to *Mapa Corpo*. Intervening between the audience and the performance tableau, he represents layers of accumulated border knowledge. In *Mapa Corpo*, the shaman stands as a connection between the more literal border art of the late-1980s and early 90s and the portable border in the post-NAFTA period. The shaman is recognizable as a hybrid figure, a cross between a witch doctor, magician, and psychic visionary. He exists on the borders between life and death, illness and health, the living world and the world of spirits. In fact, according to Marcel Mauss, the shaman or witch doctor acts almost entirely through speech, as he “inhales or sucks disease in...consequently any magical action practiced through the voice belongs to this

form of magic.”⁶³ Gómez-Peña’s chants take this role, connecting the realm of the mystical with the reality of the Iraq invasion. In this manner, he brings the hybrid culture of the border region into prominence on the world stage. The U.S.-Mexico border, and the Iraq war are linked together in a single border milieu.

For a performance at the 2009 Havana Biennial, the artists changed the meaning of the body map again, retitling the piece *Mapa Corpo III*. This version incorporated yet another perspective – that of twenty-first century Latin America. “Latin America” as such is a vast, multicultural and multi-lingual territory, and cannot be said to harbor a single perspective. Gómez-Peña and La Pocha Nostra did not attempt to engage with the region as a whole, but rather with the issue of drug cartels and their political and social hold on many Latin American nations. The piece itself had become a border shifter – changing the concept from the Iraq war and U.S. foreign policy to a new map of discord within Latin America and the general lawlessness of the region:

But since the rules of the game have shifted. . . the tone of the piece has changed, and also the nature of the piece has changed. So now the flags are no longer the flags of the forces of occupation in Iraq, but now the flags of the Latin American countries who are facing crime cartels, and it has become a piece about violence in Latin America. . . By extracting the flags, we are asking the audience to commit to fight the violence in our countries.⁶⁴

Note that Gómez-Peña attempted to shift the discourse from isolated pockets of violence (Ciudad Juárez in Mexico, Bogotá in Colombia) to a pan-Latin American continuity. The pervasive violence and the culture of fear, he argued, affects the whole region, including the United States (which, demographically, could be considered a part of Latin America). The drug cartels to which Gómez-Peña refers maintained a strong presence in most Mexican border cities since the 1970s, leading to widespread and highly publicized outbreaks of violence on the U.S.-Mexico border through the early twenty-first century. As with the first *Mapa Corpo* and the Iraq war, *Mapa Corpo III* portrayed the cartel violence primarily as

⁶³Marcel Mauss, “Art and Myth” in Marcel Mauss, Henri Hubert, and Robert Hertz, *Saints, Heroes, Myths and Rites: Classical Durkheimian Studies of Religion and Society*. Translated by Alexander Riley, Sarah Daynes, and Cyril Isnart (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2009), 27.

⁶⁴Gómez-Peña, Interview with the author (2009).

a conflict of borders and crossings not only between the United States and Mexico, but also Latin America as a whole. By using the same artistic template as *Mapa Corpo* (2003) and *Mapa Corpo II* (2005), Gómez-Peña and La Pocha Nostra drew parallels between the conflict in Iraq, international immigration and cartel violence. The *Mapa Corpo* series, in the end, combined these political and cultural milieus into a single, all-encompassing narrative.

Border artists such as Gómez-Peña both anticipated and responded to increasing global integration, broadening the definition of border art. The Columbus Quincentennial (controversy) allowed for a revisioning of history, a remapping of “discovery” narratives and conquest themes. Border artists had been exploring this dynamic long before the official Quincentennial in 1992, with works that positioned the United States as a continuation of European dominance, standing in for the Spanish empire. BAW/TAF performances from Chapter 3 such as *End of the Line* (1986) as well as earlier Chicano works including the Chicano Park Murals from Chapter 2, were prominent examples of this shift in focus away from Spain as colonial power. In turn, the specific relationship between the United States and Mexico came to stand for the larger clash of cultures and the economic disparity between the developing world and dominant industrial powers. With its waves of immigration, documented and undocumented, the U.S.-Mexico border region came to stand for the dilemma surrounding international migration of all kinds. While not strictly analogous to migration between Turkey and Germany, for example, the 150-year history of the U.S.-Mexico border has produced a template for intercultural integration and an example of the creative aspects of border thinking.

The performances I have discussed here, *Cage Performance*, *Mapa Corpo*, and to a lesser extent, *Border Brujo*, manifest a vision of the portable border. Portability brought the insights of border art and artists to a larger art world, in turn giving artists greater latitude and freedom of expression, opening up the concepts of “border” and “border art” far beyond their literal definitions. In doing so, artists have brought the lessons of the border and its specified knowledge to places seemingly unrelated to the U.S.-Mexico situation. It is because of the portable border that Guillermo Gómez-Peña could be commissioned to work

with communities in Scandinavia, or that the BAW/TAF's Michael Schnorr could come to work extensively in Europe, Australia, and Afghanistan while maintaining a presence in Tijuana.⁶⁵ The ideas of "border thinking" at the U.S.-Mexico border have been allowed to resonate globally *because* of their portability.

⁶⁵Schnorr, Interview with the author (2009). Schnorr described projects from the 1990s and early 2000s in Kabul, Stockholm, London and Sydney, works that could best be described as community interactions. In Tijuana, Schnorr, as part of the BAW/TAF, has worked extensively with the Maclovio Rojas settlement since the early 1990s, including an InSite-sponsored project from 1997.

Chapter 5

Reinscribing the Border

In expanding the definition of “border art” to include concepts of the portable or mental border, human territoriality and intercultural relations, I have outlined a trajectory from heavily situated performance to what I have termed the “portable border.” Border art of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has consistently moved toward a more conceptual notion of “border.” I argue that border art began this shift in anticipation of two major events, the postcolonial reflections of the Columbus Quincentennial of 1992 and the enactment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, which ushered in a new wave of globalization.

While artists in the 1990s were moving their practice away from the border and incorporating a more global outlook in their work, a non-profit organization called “InSite” was founded in San Diego. Originally conceived of as a local arts festival, InSite began to bring internationally recognized artists from around the world *to* the San Diego-Tijuana region, instructing them to find inspiration in the local. Thus the core historical argument of the preceding chapter is complicated by a countertrend towards site-based performance. InSite’s insistence upon the physicality of site reached a peak in the early twenty-first century with festivals in 2000-01 and 2005, amounting to a dialectical rebuttal of the portable border.

In the introduction to this dissertation, I described the paradoxical situation of late-

twentieth and early twenty-first century borders. This situation, not limited to the U.S.-Mexico border, is predicated on the “push and pull” of the border in opposing directions. As the border becomes more metaphorical, open and porous than ever, forces have been at work to strengthen and maintain the separation between nations. The paradox can be attributed to a variety of factors, including the ease of global communication and transit coupled with the economic disparity between the United States and Mexico. The demographic shifts in the U.S. interior leading to the “borderization of other urban centers” heralded by Gómez-Peña, and the rising tide of fear related to that “borderization” were also significant. It would follow, then, that with the theorization of border-as-metaphor, there would come a corresponding insistence upon the physicality of site. The U.S.-Mexico border is constantly perceived as being under attack, regardless of which side of the debate one supports. Border dwellers, especially in the Mexican cities of Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez, have seen their daily lives altered by the rule of cartels and organized crime. Anglo-Americans fearing the Latin American “invasion” perceive waves of undocumented and illegal immigration threatening the security of U.S. labor.

It follows that even though the border became portable in the eyes of some, its metaphorical quality allowing for transmission of ideas to other regions, conditions “on the ground” necessitated a continued insistence upon the physical nature of the border. I would argue that InSite’s strategy of focusing the world’s attention on a specific site is not fundamentally opposed to the portable or mental border. Instead, the organization has worked to open the region and its art production to outsiders, reinforcing the notion that anyone can be a border thinker, border dweller, or border subject. The festival’s focus on publicity-grabbing performances and stunts as well as the importation of well-known artists from beyond the border region managed to bring attention to the area, solidifying the category of “border art” for both the mainstream media and the general public.

InSite has become the most visible proponent of site-based border art in the twenty-first century, but it is not beyond the reach of criticism. Some have argued that the organization’s projects only skim the surface of the issues concerning the region, and that the artists simply move on after the completion of their projects, unconcerned with creating

a lasting impact.¹ The debate surrounding InSite brings up several significant questions – what is the value (and ultimately, the effect) of widespread public attention on the U.S.-Mexico border? How can art projects generate social change while remaining aesthetically grounded? In the case of InSite’s festivals, what, if any, new knowledge is gained from such focused attention on the physical border?



Figure 5-1: Alfredo Jaar, *The Cloud* (October 14, 2000) Valle del Matador, Tijuana-San Diego. Image from the InSite archive, San Diego, CA.

Consider the two images presented here. The first is a documentary photograph from a 2000 San Diego-Tijuana performance piece by Alfredo Jaar entitled *The Cloud*. A white oblong form floats above a canyon, stark against the blue sky. Even though this “cloud” is suspended in mid-air, it appears tethered to the ground by white cords. The cloud dissipates at one end into the wind. Closer inspection reveals smaller forms within the larger one – individual globes that make up the whole. A single musician stands in the foreground, playing a violin. The image is a memorable one, even with no knowledge of the context or background, it is clear that the cloud symbolizes something greater than itself.

By the year 2000, over three thousand border crossing deaths had been documented,

¹Artists such as Guillermo Gómez-Peña of La Pocha Nostra and Tijuana-based Luis Ituarte of Consejo Fronteriza por Arte y Cultura (COFAC) have leveled criticism at InSite, questioning the organization’s effectiveness in relation to its stated goals of bringing the United States and Mexico closer together through art. Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Interview with the author, San Francisco, CA, March 23, 2009; Luis Ituarte, Interview with the author, Tijuana, BC, Mexico, February 9, 2009.



Figure 5-2: Javier Téllez, *One Flew Over the Void* (2005). Image from the InSite archive, San Diego, CA.

whether at the hands of vigilantes, exposure in the desert, or other means.² With *The Cloud*, Jaar intended both to memorialize these deaths and bring a greater degree of attention to the human rights violations involved.³ For the piece, Jaar commissioned the production of over 1,000 white balloons and had them imprinted with the names of the identifiable border casualties. The balloons were gathered together in a transparent net and floated over the border, tethered temporarily to the ground. The site, directly on the U.S.-Mexico border, was considered an especially dangerous location for crossing. On the day of the performance, the balloons were released from the netting, floating back into Mexico. Jaar composed a Spanish-language poem, *Tras El Muro* ("Across the Wall") read especially for the occasion, and a solo violinist accompanied the scene. These elements of the performance are not readily evident in images, which focus on the oblong balloon cloud hovering over the border. In documentary footage of the performance, however, the auditory components of the piece contribute to the solemn nature of the performance.

²This number cannot be specified because of the vagaries of tabulating border deaths. Often, bodies found in the desert are unidentifiable, and it is uncertain whether the dead are illegal crossers or simply tourists lost in the desert. Other obstacles to an exact count include the actions of certain Border Patrol members to move bodies back to the Mexican side before they could be included in the tally of U.S. border crossing deaths (from Urrea's *The Devil's Highway*).

³Jo-Anne Berelowitz, "Border Art since 1965" in *Postborder City: Cultural Spaces of Baja California*, eds. Michael Dear and Gustavo Leclerc (Routledge: New York, 2003) 177.

The second image, from Javier Téllez' 2005 performance in Tijuana, *One Flew Over the Void*, conveys a very different mood. The upper half of the photo is occupied by a single figure - a human form suspended in mid-air against a cloudless blue sky. The lower half of the image reveals the context: the body appears to be flying over the steel fence that divides a beach, while a sizeable crowd watches from below. To the left, a star-spangled cannon points upward, revealing the source of the stuntman's flight. Tents and a makeshift stage line up against the fence, along with a patchwork quilt depicting U.S. and Mexican flags. Although the viewer lacks the context for this cannonball flight, he or she can tell that the image depicts an event, a performance meant for public consumption. On first appearance, the human cannonball is more readily accessible than the balloon cloud.

Along the entire border activated by InSite, artists are located on the periphery of the two nations, as well as the mainstream art world. This positioning of center and periphery is a elementary one, having been called into question in 1990 by Arjun Appadurai,⁴ and can easily be complicated by the emergence of Tijuana as an autonomous art center, separated from the international border and its politics. Over the past decade, Tijuana has grown into a major international art center, home to artists who extend their focus far past the border and its particularities. This underscores the differences between the art scenes in Mexico and in the United States. Tijuana rivals Mexico City in artistic production, exporting more art than any other city in the country. San Diego, however, is part of the periphery of the U.S. art scene. Production in San Diego centers on the Chicano Art Movement and themes of the border. While Tijuana itself is no longer peripheral to the art world, San Diego and the themes of the U.S.-Mexico border are still far from the mainstream.

Both of above images document performances commissioned by InSite and situated on the U.S.-Mexico border at San Diego-Tijuana, specifically, art that attempts to raise public awareness about the social conditions and human rights issues of the region. Projects dealing with social issues have a loaded task – to distinguish themselves as art, rather than

⁴Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Economy." In *Public Culture* 2 (1990): 1-24. Rather than a binary center-periphery model, or even one with multiple centers, Appadurai proposes that the global cultural economy be theorized in terms of fluid constructions: technoscapes, ethnoscapas, mediascapas, ideoscapes, and finanscapas (6-7). Although this model seeks to replace the somewhat out-moded center-periphery one, it cannot adequately explain the relationship of the U.S.-Mexico border region to the mainstream art world.

just social protest or a political movement.⁵ The question of art and politics has been the subject of intense debate since at least the writings of the Frankfurt School to the present day.⁶ I would argue that border art adds another level to the debate of politico-aesthetic coexistence, for the border poses the following question: Can *border art* exist without a social imperative? Socio-political turmoil actually creates the conditions for border art to exist.

Border art falls somewhere between the extreme pessimism espoused by Adorno and the optimism of Jacques Rancière. In his 2000 book *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, Rancière allows for the coexistence of aesthetics and politics. For him, the aestheticization of politics is not the rise of fascism described by Benjamin in 1936, but the tendency of artistic practices to intervene in “modes of being and forms of visibility.”⁷ Activist art on the U.S.-Mexico border attempts to undertake such an intervention, particularly in the ways by which these projects reveal the realities of border existence. But in confrontation with Rancière’s optimism, we have seen that border art, in its attempt to enact social change, is on some level co-opted by the culture industry it seeks to undo. The entire apparatus of InSite, complete with its funding and distribution channels, manufactures art projects and performances ready made for mass consumption. In the guise of sponsoring art that sought to remake the border region, InSite turned border art into a brand. But this does not completely exhaust the potential of these art projects. Even InSite’s particularly branded artworks have an effect that lasts far beyond the originally intended one, due to the reach of the festival’s documentation and marketing. Removed from the original context, no one can say for sure what the effect is. It is this unpredictability for which neither theorization – Adorno or Rancière – can completely account.

⁵According to art historian Claire Bishop, art’s relationship to social and political change is a contradiction, but a productive one, “characterized precisely by that tension between faith in art’s autonomy and belief in art as inextricably bound to the promise of a better world to come.” In her optimistic view, politically motivated art is not necessarily separate from aesthetics. (Claire Bishop, “The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents,” *Artforum*, February 2006).

⁶See Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1994, orig. 1944). Also Adorno’s “Cultural Criticism and Society” in *Prisms* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967). Also Walter Benjamin’s canonical essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936).

⁷Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, (New York: Continuum, 2004, orig. 2000), 13.

Thus border art can be located far from any physical border; the connection is its attention to the realities of the human condition *at* the border – migration, labor, narcotrafficking, kidnapping, displacement – when two cultures/civilizations collide and groups of people are caught in-between. Border art in general is about this in-between state, one that has become more common in the early twenty-first century with increased globalization.⁸ The tension between art and politics – the tendency of one to overtake the other in a given piece – still exists at the border. That tension is itself productive, for the artist must, in dealing with the region, address its socio-political reality. The challenge is to find new and effective ways of accomplishing this task.

If one considers that on the border, artists are not simply generating attention for themselves, but rather creating specialized knowledge that can be incorporated by political and art activists elsewhere, then border artists engage in Walter D. Mignolo’s aptly-termed “border thinking.”⁹ Even though I discussed border thinking in terms of portability in Chapter Four, the concept can apply to artists engaging with the re-energized discourse of site-specificity. This chapter will focus on two examples of this specialized knowledge through performative tactics used in twenty and twenty-first century border art: the symbolic gesture and the spectacle. The relationship between these two terms is a complicated one that I will elaborate with further analysis.

Although reduced through images to the similarity of “object flying over the border airspace,” the two works mentioned earlier embody approaches to socially aware art on the border. Jaar’s *Cloud* looks back to a twenty-year tradition of symbolism in border art, bringing attention to specific human rights violations in the region through his memorialization of border crossing deaths. Téllez, with his *One Flew Over the Void*, engineers and manipulates the spectacle, in what I am claiming amounts to a *reversal* of the long-criticized spectacle form. The relationship between the two approaches, however, is not such a simple binary. Elements of symbolic gesture and spectacle coexist in each work, but this is an un-

⁸For a discussion of the effects of globalization on a human level, see Pico Iyer’s *The Global Soul: Jet Lag, Shopping Malls, and the Search for Home* (New York: Knopf, 2000).

⁹Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). See page 5 for his definition of “border thinking.” For an analysis of Mignolo’s ideas in the context of border art, see Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

easy partnership. The symbolic gesture looks inward for significance; the resulting artwork speaks to the world, but through a consistent language endemic to the border region. In contrast, the spectacle is found at the interaction of artist intention and public reception – the artist seeks to create a spectacular event, and the public must recognize it as such.

The term “symbolic gesture” has been used informally in reference to border performance, most notably by performance artist and writer Guillermo Gómez-Peña. Gómez-Peña has described the connection between art, the border, and social change in terms of the “symbolic gesture”, claiming that “another contribution of border art was the idea that symbolic politics were more efficient than pragmatic activism. . . border artists understood that if a symbolic action, an allegorical action in a highly charged political territory such as the border could be picked up by the media and become emblematic, it would affect the way both countries understood the border.”¹⁰ The focus here is on the “allegorical action in a highly charged political territory” that creates an indelible image, one that lives on beyond the original art piece and can be taken up by other groups, causes or organizations.

Gómez-Peña’s definition of symbolic gesture conflates symbolism with allegory, leading one to a deeper examination of the term – is it in fact symbol, or does it qualify as an allegory? I would argue that most examples (in border art) of the symbolic gesture fall within the realm of symbolism rather than allegory. One could argue, however, that art of the border region sets up an allegory of intercultural relations, but this observation falls outside the range of “symbolic gesture” and more towards border art as a whole. This idea formed a basis for art activism on the border, with many of the most effective projects striving to create an indelible image for the public.¹¹

Although border artists, primarily members and former members of the BAW/TAF, popularized the idea of the symbolic gesture in U.S.-Mexico relations, the discourse of the spectacle has also contributed greatly to site-specific performances of the twenty-first century. By invoking “spectacle,” I am consciously calling up the work of Guy Debord¹²

¹⁰Gómez-Peña, Interview with the author (2009).

¹¹It is up to the viewer to interpret the specific political leanings of an individual piece, but the general themes (the blurring/erasure of the international border, rights of immigrants, etc) are clearly leftist in nature.

¹²Debord’s work on the spectacle is summed up in his book *Society of the Spectacle* (originally published

for whom art in the 1960s had become nothing but “capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image.”¹³ Art of the U.S.-Mexico border navigates the spectacle as well as the socio-political dynamics at work in the region. I contend that site-specific art on the border engages in a reversal of Debord’s spectacle, as artists use the public art “event” to bring attention to a region shrouded in secrecy and return political action back to art. In these pieces, the spectacle is called upon by the artist as a strategy, rather than as a trope to be undermined. In a society of fast-moving and ubiquitous images, it is the function of this artist-controlled spectacle to arrest the viewer, bringing attention to the socio-political issues behind the work rather than serve as a distraction from the real. In practice, this reversal is often ineffective, for the mainstream spectacle (which can be seen as part of the culture industry)¹⁴ tends to absorb and co-opt any attempts to undo it.

At this point, it becomes necessary to examine the particularities of the twentieth and twenty-first century U.S.-Mexico border situation and how it has generated such a strong connection between art, spectacle, and social change.¹⁵ Given the cultural ferment of the contact zone between the two countries and the liberal funding policies supporting such organizations as the BAW/TAF and InSite, an artistic imperative for change emerged in this U.S.-Mexico border area. Politics pushed border art to develop attention-getting strategies, dependent on the symbolic gesture and appropriated others including the spectacle.

The borderlands are (and have been) a space of intense controversy surrounding legal and illegal migration, drug trafficking, human rights violations, and the industrial buildup along the Mexican side. Socially minded art developed in the region specifically because of these issues that had persisted, in some form or another, for the more than 150-year history of the border. This mix of humanity, international and cultural conflict, and the very futility of enacting permanent change in such a fluid region has proved irresistible to

1967, film version 1973). For a thorough treatment of the Situationist International in its historical context, see Simon Ford, *The Situationist International: A User’s Guide* (Black Dog Publishing: London, 2005).

¹³Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Paris, 1967) Thesis 34.

¹⁴For Theodore Adorno’s and Max Horkheimer’s work on the culture industry see “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944).

¹⁵The border has served as a locus for social change since the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe and the 1852 Gadsden Purchase established the present-day line. When the line was established in 1848 (as well as through the prior Mexican-American War) much of Mexico’s northern territory changed hands to become the southwestern United States. The inhabitants of this region remained, creating (initially) a majority Mexican-American population.

certain artists. Art of this region not only addresses these issues, but, in its most proactive form, attempts to enact change. Early efforts by Chicano art activists and the members of the BAW/TAF brought attention to the absurdity of the border fence itself and to the socio-economic disparities that result from it.

InSite, however, began not as an approach to the U.S.-Mexico border, but as a means to address the perceived lack of cultural institutions in San Diego. This fact itself is significant, because at the time, San Diego boasted many artist-organized groups and collectives including the binational BAW/TAF, whose work was being recognized on a national and international level, but was of seemingly little salience to the founders of InSite.¹⁶ San Diego's local art scene was centered primarily on its Museum of Contemporary Art, which lacked the resources to "galvanize the energy of then-current artistic practice."¹⁷ InSite's original goal, then, was to serve the city of San Diego – the "site" implied in the title. Although a small event with an original estimated budget of \$3,500, InSite 92 (officially titled IN/SITE '92) was well received by the local media and even, according to executive director Michael Krichman, "generated a disproportionate amount of ink" compared to the number of projects funded.¹⁸ Only with the 1994 version did the festival open up to cross-border projects and create partnerships with cultural institutions in Tijuana.

I would argue that InSite has defined mainstream border art production of the twenty-first century, inserting itself into a contentious dialogue with Latino and Chicano art activists. The organization helped to generate a resurgence of art that focuses primarily on site, rather than more generalized notions of globalization or cultural contact. During its seventeen-year history, the festival brought art-world attention to the U.S.-Mexico border and in doing so, became synonymous with a specific kind of site-based border art production. The most visible of these projects often combine an internationally recognized artist with a staged event on the border. InSite's projects attempt to open up the region, bringing

¹⁶In 1990, the BAW/TAF had been invited to exhibit at the Venice Biennale. Their show was inserted into the alternate event, "Aperto," focusing on the U.S.-Mexico border, including issues of colonialism and international boundaries.

¹⁷*InSite_05* (San Diego: Installation Gallery, 2006), 418. InSite was funded by cultural and educational institutions in the United States and Mexico (San Diego and Tijuana), including San Diego's Museum of Contemporary Art and the University of California San Diego, and Tijuana's Centro Cultural (CECUT).

¹⁸Michael Krichman, quoted in *InSite_05* (2006), 15.

these otherwise peripheral experiences to the mainstream. Despite these goals, InSite has come under intense criticism for its methods and its focus on the physicality of site.

While the general trend in the art world moved away from site-specificity and toward a more global concept of “cultural contact”, border art organizations such as InSite led a resurgence of art that relies heavily on its location.¹⁹ As stated earlier, InSite’s first iteration focused on art projects that were wedded to their site, alluding to, if not necessarily at the border. Subsequent festivals, in 1994, 1997 and 2000, moved steadily toward a notion of site-based border art. With the 1997 version in particular, InSite gained national prominence with an installation by Marcos Ramírez ERRE,²⁰ who constructed a giant two-headed Trojan horse (*Toy-an Horse*) to straddle the international border crossing at San Ysidro.²¹ The horse was seen by the more than 136,000 people each day who pass through the crossing either on foot or by car. The iconography of the wooden horse was instantly recognizable. The artwork had appeared overnight at the border crossing, seemingly a “gift” from each nation to the other and recreating the scene from Greek mythology. Was the two-headed horse, looking at both sides of the border, a kind of stealth attack on the border region and all its presuppositions? If so, what, or who, was doing the attacking?

I would argue that the *Toy-an Horse* installation marked a turning point for InSite. The piece became an unintentional “star” of InSite ’97. After a 2000 Whitney Biennial border art piece entitled *Stripes and Fence Forever – Homage to Jasper Johns*, Ramírez ERRE eventually shifted his focus from the border to broader topics,²² but the horse remained in collective memory as an instant signifier for U.S.-Mexico relations. The media

¹⁹Although I will discuss two InSite projects here, grassroots movements have also used these tactics to bring about social awareness. For example, Chicano activist/artist Mario Torero’s collective “Bl/ev” (a play on the word “believe”) is currently attempting to bring attention to the gentrification of San Diego’s primarily Mexican-American Barrio Logan neighborhood. In March of 2009, Bl/ev sponsored a Cesar Chavez parade through the community, obtaining grants to paint each of the residences and businesses along Logan Avenue. The ultimate goal was a street full of murals, revitalizing a tradition that had begun with Chicano Park. Whether or not Torero’s project ultimately succeeds, its main strategies – the spectacle of the parade and the symbolism inherent in mural painting – are endemic to the border.

²⁰The artist, Marcos Ramírez, adopted the extra surname “ERRE,” a play on the Spanish “double-r” sound as well as a possible Duchampian reference.

²¹InSITE97 (San Diego: Installation Gallery, 1997).

²²Ramírez ERRE began to explore more universal themes of love and conflict resolution with his 2003 pieces *The Multiplication of the Bread* and *Garden of Angels*. In 2007 he collaborated with other artists for a project exploring the impact of human beings on the planet – *Human/Nature*.

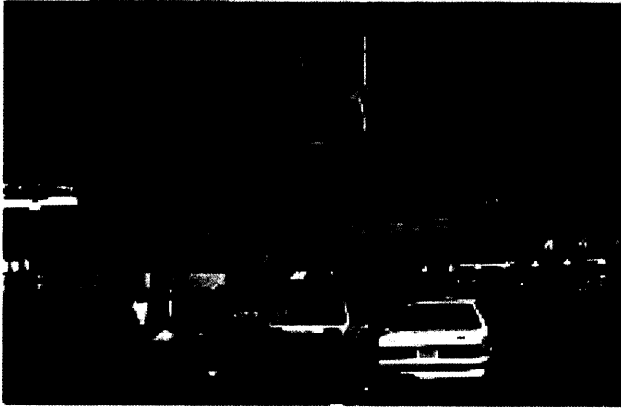


Figure 5-3: Marcos Ramírez ERRE, *To-yan Horse* (1997). The horse straddles the actual international border line, while the U.S. Immigration facilities (seen behind the horse in this image) lie in U.S. territory. Image from the InSite archive, San Diego, CA.

success of this project led to the development of further InSite border installations intended to provoke discussion and debate. By 2000, the organization's focus rested squarely on the border and its ability to generate public attention in a formerly peripheral region – making the periphery mainstream. InSite 2000-01 featured, aside from Jaar's *Cloud* performance, many attention-getting border art pieces, including a binational pro-wrestling exhibition by the Mexican-born artist Carlos Amorales (*Amorales vs. Amorales*, 2000).

InSite's attempts to redefine the San Diego/Tijuana region affected the majority of mainstream border art production. By the early 1990s, artists such as the Mexican-born Guillermo Gómez-Peña had begun making art that embraced a more portable notion of "border." As discussed in Chapter Four, borders became conflated with such concepts as globalization trends, international migration, neo- and post-colonialism. Shortly afterwards, InSite took a reductive, almost reactionary view of site intended to bring the focus back to the physical boundary. For InSite projects, the site is integral to, and in some cases overshadows the artwork itself. In Tellez' case, a human cannonball flying over the border is Art, while the same spectacle at a circus is simply mass entertainment.

The organization has also come under intense scrutiny from local artists, Chicano activists, and the media. Luis Ituarte, Tijuana native and founder of the Consejo Fronteriza de Arte y Cultura (COFAC) in 1995 criticized InSite for focusing too literally on the border

politics, “most of the proposals that these people have done don’t have an opening. They are kind of like criticizing what is happening, or looking at it from the human side of how people are suffering...I like to see the other part.”²³ This “opening” to which he refers is a critical part of much activist art – creating a space for change. By emphasizing the socio-political situation at the border, InSite projects are poised to generate awareness, but few encourage the viewer to act. InSite has also been called “elitist,” making no effort to “integrate the local artists, especially not Latinos or Chicanos.”²⁴ In response, InSite_05 purported to have a greater focus on community interaction and involvement, emphasizing grassroots projects over performance “events.” Even the most visible exception to this effort, Téllez’ *One Flew Over the Void*, contained an element of community interaction, for the artist continued his work with mental institutions and incorporated some of the patients into the final performance.

InSite, and its choice of which artists to include in the festivals, recalls the border problematic discussed in Chapter 1. Many critics of the organization claimed that InSite privileged the artworld perspective over local interests, even as it brought greater attention to the region. Is it even possible to mediate between the “insider” status of border-dwellers and the “outsider” status of the artists and organizers? Early iterations of InSite invited local, San Diego artists and many from Mexico. By InSite 97, however, a large number of international artists were included, invited from abroad and brought to the border for a two-week consultation period.²⁵ This trend continued through the two subsequent festivals in 2000-01 and 2005.

Artists who have made an entire career of border art have been conflicted as to this relationship. Guillermo Gómez-Peña has claimed that “...these are extremely interesting projects. To me the problem is what the art world does with them. If they are meant to simply contribute to the long list of extreme art experiences codified by the international art world, or are they actually contributing to a more complex and better understanding in the relationship between the two countries?”²⁶ Gómez-Peña’s point here is a relevant

²³Luis Ituarte, interview with the author (2009).

²⁴Mario Torero, Interview with the Author, San Diego, CA, February 14, 2009.

²⁵Information gathered from the InSite archive, San Diego, CA.

²⁶Gómez-Peña, Interview with the author (2009).

one, for it emphasizes two countries, the United States and Mexico. But what of the rest of the world – is it possible for a U.S.-Mexico border artwork to contribute to the relationship between other countries? In the case of Alfredo Jaar’s project, his home country of Chile, his European audiences, even the African countries to which he has devoted so much of his career, all of these places are at least peripherally invoked in the work. Although Jaar’s *Cloud* straddles the United States and Mexico, it is Jaar’s international standing that allows for a multi-faceted dialogue on the subject. In discussing border art, it is of utmost importance not to privilege a certain point of view over the other, the “insider” over the “outsider” or vice versa. Gómez-Peña himself, as he readily admits, is an outsider by birth, although he has attained “insider” status through his decades-long association with the border.

The question here is not whether outside art can contribute to the relationship among different countries, but how the work constructs a productive and long-term dialogue between the individuals or groups affected. Many InSite projects create a novel way of addressing the border that lasts as long as the festival or the piece itself. In 1997, the Belgian-born Francis Alÿs crossed the border from Tijuana to San Diego by way of Australia, Southeast Asia, Japan, and North America, sending postcards to InSite from each destination. Titled *The Loop*, the project was roundly criticized as a border art gimmick – crossing the border without enacting a “border crossing” – but to what end?²⁷ Alÿs certainly situated the U.S.-Mexico border within a larger network of international borders and border crossings, and the piece had potential to raise questions as to the nature of this relationship. Whether on the part of the artist or the organization, this line of thought was never fully pursued. Works such as Alÿs’ piece have tended to disappear once the festival ends; they leave no lingering images, and generate no lasting conversation.

In the historic context, it is necessary to examine *why* InSite insisted upon the physical border, rather than further exploring the concepts of portability and mentality. InSite re-inscribed the concept of site as a response to the political reality of the border. The region is highly charged, magnifying every symbolic or artistic gesture. Artists are both

²⁷See the Krichman interview in InSite_05’s catalogue, *Situational Public*.

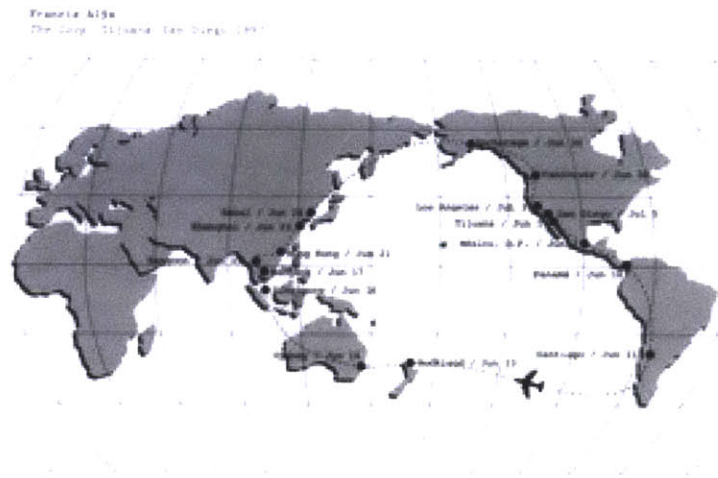


Figure 5-4: Francis Alÿs, *The Loop* (1997). This image shows the planned route of this non-crossing. Courtesy of the InSite archive, San Diego, CA.

challenged and inspired by the border. Bringing attention to the physical site, rather than to more postmodern concepts of global flows and migratory patterns, also allows for the organization to effect practical change. InSite, as well as numerous grassroots organizations focusing on the border, has sought tangible results – a reduction of border crossing deaths, decreased militarization, ultimately the destruction of the wall.

Although the site-specific imperative initially seems like a return to earlier ways of addressing the border, InSite has actually benefited from the decoupling of the border from the physicality of site. The notion of hosting an international arts festival in Tijuana-San Diego, bringing international artists to the border to solicit their perspective, reverses the flow of the portable border. Rather than new knowledge moving from the border to the rest of the world, InSite brings global expertise to the region – the creation of new knowledge at and for the border. This dynamic is the result of political realism informed by the postmodern dematerialization of the border.

The two main works I explore in this chapter are both pieces by artists labeled “outsiders.” Although Jaar, a Chilean, and Téllez, a Venezuelan, are originally from Latin America, the experiences of South Americans cannot be equated with those of Mexican *norteños* dwelling on the international border. Jaar and Téllez are artists who have ex-

plored social issues throughout their careers and have sought to focus on giving voice and representation to the unseen and repressed. Despite the differences between various Latin American nationalities or cultures, there still exists a tendency to group them under the umbrella of “Latino/a” or “Hispanic.” The problem of these terms moves far beyond the scope of this dissertation, delving into questions of identity politics, especially the connection with Spain (and the rest of Europe). It is possible and even probable that Téllez’ selection for InSite.05 was based in part on his Latin American identity, even though his native Venezuela has little to no connection with the U.S.-Mexico border.

For his project proposal for InSite 2000-01, Jaar focused on the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border over the past decade. For Jaar, “as economic globalization is being celebrated as the triumph of international capitalism across frontiers, the border between Mexico and the United States has seen implemented the most draconian military measures in its history.”²⁸ He implicitly refers to the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986²⁹ and Operation Gatekeeper, the measures implemented in 1994 in the San Diego area to militarize the border.³⁰ The militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border involved equipping the Border Patrol with military technology, including infrared night scopes and electronic sensors. The new protocols for patrolling the territory were equated with those for fighting a guerilla war, or “low intensity conflict.”³¹ At the time, these measures generated huge amounts of protest, as the net effect was to force the majority of illegal border crossers to the periphery of major urban centers, and, eventually, to the desert.³²

The notion of art and social change is found throughout Jaar’s work, and *The Cloud* is not a departure from his main concerns. Jaar’s previous projects focused on such issues

²⁸Alfredo Jaar. Project Proposal for InSite 2000-01, *The Cloud*. From the InSite Archive, San Diego, CA.

²⁹Timothy J. Dunn. *The Militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1978-1992* (Austin: CMAS, 1996), 4. The IRCA implemented a military protocol for patrolling the border. This protocol adhered to the standards of Low Intensity Conflict (LIC) doctrine, appropriate for guerilla warfare and the “War on Drugs.”

³⁰Department of Justice website, Accessed June 23, 2009: <http://www.usdoj.gov/oig/special/9807/gkp01.htm>.

³¹Dunn, *The Militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border* (1996), 4.

³²For a detailed case study of the perils of desert crossing, as well as the role of the Border Patrol in preventing unnecessary deaths, see Luis Alberto Urrea’s *The Devil’s Highway: A True Story*, which recounts the tragic story of twenty-six border crossers lost in the Arizona desert.

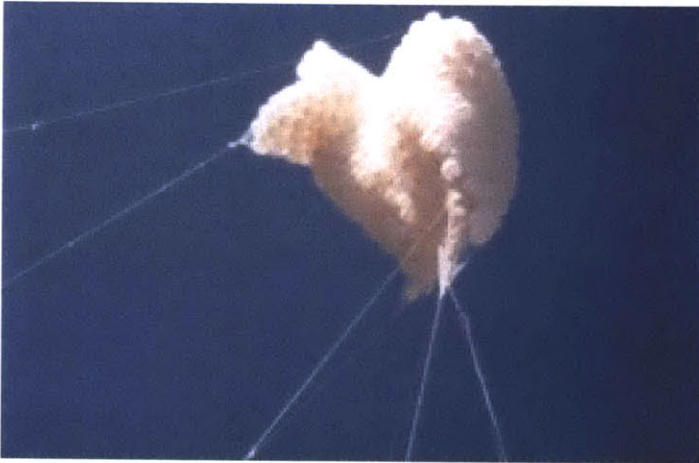


Figure 5-5: Alfredo Jaar, *The Cloud* (2000). Image from the InSite archive, San Diego, CA.

as the Rwandan genocide³³ and immigration barriers to refugees.³⁴ He often relied on the power of striking symbolic imagery to get across a message. For his 1999 piece *Lights in the City*, Jaar used the symbolic power of light to call attention to Montreal's homeless population. Whenever a homeless person entered a designated shelter, he or she was invited to press a button, turning on a light in the city's landmark building, the cupola of the Marché Bonsecours. The succession of homeless into the city's shelters turned the cupola into a "non-stop lighthouse", signaling to the rest of the city the plight of Montreal's poor.³⁵ In Jaar's work, it is the image, or sometimes lack thereof³⁶ that provides the lasting socio-political impact.³⁷

It is clear that Jaar's work traffics heavily in symbols, both visual and verbal. A major component of his works is their public nature – the Montreal project takes advantage of one of the most visible locations in the city. Jaar's particular brand of social change works on this attention-getting level, creating a kind of heavily symbolic spectacle dependent on

³³ Alfredo Jaar, *Rwanda Project* (1994-2000).

³⁴ Alfredo Jaar, *One Million Finnish Passports* (1994). These and other Jaar projects are described in Jaar's *The Fire This Time: Public Interventions 1979-2005* (2005).

³⁵ A description of this project and other recent work can be found on Alfredo Jaar's website: www.alfredojaar.net.

³⁶ Alfredo Jaar, *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita* (1996).

³⁷ Images themselves carry widespread implications, whether they are shown or hidden from public view, but this is a topic far beyond the scope of this work. For a discussion of how images function in the Rwanda works of Alfredo Jaar, see Jacques Rancière's essay "Theater of Images" and Nicole Schweizer's "The Politics of Images: An Introduction" in *Alfredo Jaar: La Politique des Images* (Lausanne: JRP/Ringier, 2008).

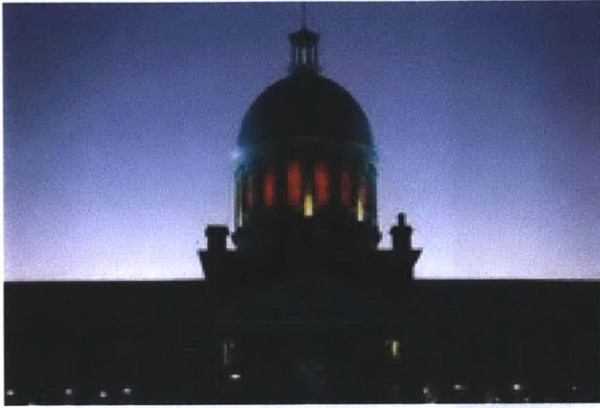


Figure 5-6: Alfredo Jaar, *Lights in the City* (1999). Image online at <http://politicstheoryphotography.blogspot.com/2008/04/disappearing-poor.html>.

the viewer's reaction for significance. In most cases, his projects generate interest without specifically elaborating on their subject matter. In the example of *Lights in the City*, the meaning of the blinking lights is not readily apparent to the viewer, but it is a curious enough circumstance to generate a discussion.

Equally symbolic was Jaar's approach to the U.S.-Mexico border. For *The Cloud*, the original event, though open to an audience, was located in a site too remote for an entire population to witness; the actual performance was attended only by victims' families and the artworld crowd of San Diego-Tijuana. In this case, the publicity images, including the one mentioned earlier, were disseminated through InSite's networks to critics and the media. These photographs and video documentation were taken by InSite primarily for this purpose. Visitors to the InSite 2000-01 exhibition could view this footage in lieu of witnessing the actual performance.

For *The Cloud*, the work's site is the primary source of meaning. This dependency alters the way one views the piece and frames all subsequent discussions. At the site of crossing, the connection to the border is literal and tangible; without this specificity, the meaning of the work is lost. A cloud of balloons above the border fence brings attention to human rights violations and needless deaths; balloons above a car dealership announce a sale. It is the piece's striking setting – the barren canyon, the brilliant blue sky – that draws interest to the balloon cloud. The juxtaposition of this highly artificial cloud against



Figure 5-7: Site for *The Cloud*, Valle del Matador on the U.S.-Mexico border. Image from the InSite archive, San Diego, CA.

the backdrop of nature is disconcerting to the viewer. One might wonder why the artist had blocked such a view with an ungainly man-made object.³⁸ Greater familiarity with the site brings greater clarity. Jaar's artificial cloud intrudes on this solemn landscape, calling attention to the border crossing tragedies that happen there on a daily basis.

While the official site of the piece is Valle del Matador, a secondary element of site must be recognized. The cloud floats in the air, hovering above the ground, yet temporarily tethered to it. When released, the balloons floated not towards the United States, the direction of the prevailing winds, but instead were carried on a gust toward Mexico. Originally, Jaar had intended for the cloud to float toward the United States, in a final (successful) border crossing for the dead. Instead, the balloons moved south, lending a different kind of symbolism to the work. These balloons, imprinted with the names of fallen border crossers, were literally returning to Mexico, as the bodies of the immigrants had been returned by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Jaar not only memorialized the victims, but

³⁸This statement reflects the point of view of the art audience. The families of the border crossing victims would most likely regard the site with dread or sorrow, rather than considering the "spectacular view." For any border art performance, audiences with personal experiences of border crossing will have a different reaction than the generic viewer. Because I am considering these works' impact on the general public and the means by which they raise awareness, I am primarily taking into account this reaction, rather than more personal experiences.

also symbolically sent them home.³⁹

For this aspect of the piece, the site works on several levels. First, the literal border line separates Mexico from the United States, giving the balloons' migration this poignant international dimension. Second, the Valle del Matador site recalls the human tragedy of border crossing. Finally, the cloud's location in the air, with the unpredictable behavior of the wind, allowed for the further symbolism of the homecoming. Using the airspace over the border is a commonality between Jaar and Téllez' works, mainly because it is unobstructed, leading to greater visibility for the piece. Objects floating over the border are an unexpected occurrence, capturing attention precisely because they defy the everyday appearance of the border. This transparency stands in stark contrast to the majority of illegal border crossings, pushed far from view to the middle of the desert.

With this work, there are multiple, somewhat conflicting reasons for the choice of symbol. The cloud instantly invokes the heavens, possibly a religious invocation. The dead, inscribed on the balloons, are ascending towards heaven.⁴⁰ This interpretation, however, ignores a basic observation of the piece, that the cloud is mute, rendered almost insignificant in comparison with the natural surroundings and the overwhelming gravitas of the ceremony. In the face of this silence, the aural components of Jaar's piece (the poem, the violin solo) gain a greater level of importance. Added to this, the viewer cannot read the names on the balloons or even be aware of such a detail. It is only in Jaar's description of the work that one can take this fact into account. In this sense, the balloons represent the anonymity of the victims, how they are instantly forgotten amid the clamor of the national news cycle, in the continuous refreshment of the spectacle. Even when the bodies are identified, the public seldom learns the border crossers' names or any personal information. The balloons float silently, incapable of expressing either the travails of border crossing or the complexity of the decision to cross in the first place.

While Jaar's intention was to promote awareness of the increased militarization of

³⁹This homecoming is even more significant given that many bodies discovered in the desert are beyond identification. In these cases, they remain unclaimed and are often buried unmarked in the United States. Jaar's *Cloud* symbolically sent these unidentified victims home, even when they literally never return.

⁴⁰From the viewer's vantage point, the names cannot be seen at all; one only learns this fact through reading the event's promotional literature.

the border and its consequences, the piece itself gives no easy talking points. Although Jaar humanizes the white globes by imprinting them with the names of the more than three thousand victims, the piece aestheticizes the sense of loss above all else. While creating poignant and stunning visuals, *The Cloud* remains literally disconnected from the situation on the ground. In this manner, the work stands as a symbolic gesture, with the emphasis on “gesture.” In Jaar’s (and others’) expectation, the viewer is then led to pursue deeper questions concerning the nature of U.S.-Mexico relations. How have the political and economic realities of each country forced such illegal crossings? What of those who succeed, only to be caught later and deported? This ambiguity is typical of Jaar, who “involves repositioning himself on the hierarchy of expressive control, placing himself between viewer and subject as mediator and facilitator rather than executive officer.”⁴¹ In short, the symbolic gesture works on this level, conveying just enough information to arouse the viewer’s interest, rather than bombarding him or her with overwhelming statistics. This process builds social change organically, ultimately provoking viewers to pursue answers.



Figure 5-8: Javier Téllez, another view of *One Flew Over the Void* (2005). Image from the InSite archive, San Diego, CA.

Similarly invoking the “airspace” over the border was InSite 2005’s flagship event, *One Flew Over the Void*.⁴² The iconic image (from p. [?]) produced from the performance

⁴¹Jaar, *The Fire This Time*, 19.

⁴²Cannonball Smith, described in Téllez’ proposal as the “world’s most illustrious human cannonball”

showed the stuntman in mid-air directly over the fence separating the United States from Mexico. An artistically cropped version of that image appeared on the cover of the InSite 2005 catalogue, cementing the organization's relationship to this particular kind of event art.

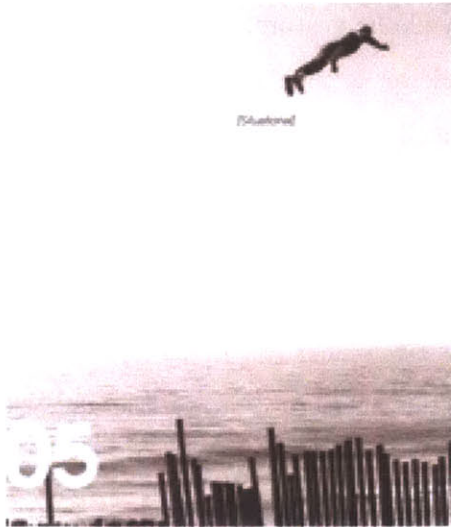


Figure 5-9: The front cover of the main InSite.05 catalogue showing a cropped version of Tellez' *One Flew Over the Void* (catalogue published 2006). Image of the book cover provided by the InSite archive, San Diego, CA.

The absurdity of the human form flying over the line complements the absurdity of the fence reaching out into the ocean, as if trying to separate even the Mexican *water* from that of the United States. The human cannonball flight was the culmination of a full-day festival straddling the border, for which even the Guinness Book of World Records was notified. While the performance was neither the longest human cannonball flight nor the highest, it did qualify for the book's category of "fastest international border crossing."⁴³ Beyond the obvious gimmick, which attracted the attention of the media as well as the general public, Téllez' performance served as both a symbolic gesture and a commentary on the spectacle.

I define the spectacle in light of prior theorizations. According to the Situationist

already holds the records for the longest and highest cannonball flights. (From the InSite archive, San Diego, CA).

⁴³Javier Téllez. Project Proposal and Documentation for *One Flew Over the Void*. InSite Archives, San Diego, CA.

International leader Guy Debord, the spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.⁴⁴ Debord describes a society “devastated by the shift from use-value and material concreteness to exchange value and the world of appearances.”⁴⁵ In these formulations, the spectacle propels a Marxian “false consciousness;” it is a distraction to the public, meant to placate, convince and cajole. The artwork is lost within this competition of appearances. In a recent theorization by Charles Garoian and Yvonne Gaudelius, visual culture is a kind of “spectacle pedagogy” – images are among the forms that teach us what and how to see and think, mediating the ways in which we interact with each other as social beings.⁴⁶ Images, such as the documentation of Jaar’s balloons or those of Téllez’ human cannonball commission, are the primary means by which artists communicate; the performance itself must be image-ready, capable of producing striking visuals that are easily digested. My claim, however, is that the *meaning* of these spectacles is not so easily digested. In this case, the reversal goes beyond simply generating mass attention to raise social awareness; Téllez instead created a *parody* of the mainstream spectacle.

For *One Flew over the Void*, what are the elements of spectacle being parodied or reversed? I would argue that the primary connection with the spectacle is found in the relationship of human cannonball to the international border. First, the human cannonball itself is a product of mass entertainment. Accordingly, Téllez created a circus atmosphere for the event, captured in the images of the crowd and the homemade banners below. The crowd itself is a form of spectacle, a mixture of the general public and a group of mental patients wearing masks as part of the performance. Working with the physically and mentally challenged and examining the institutional dynamics at play has been a recurring theme throughout Téllez’ career.⁴⁷ With this combination of elements – stuntman, mental patients, international border crossing – the entire performance reads like a vaudevillian throwback.

⁴⁴Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), Thesis 4.

⁴⁵Simon Ford, *The Situationist International: A User’s Guide* (London, 2005), 102.

⁴⁶Charles R. Garoian and Yvonne M. Gaudelius, *Spectacle Pedagogy: Art, Politics, and Visual Culture* (Albany, SUNY Press, 2008), 2.

⁴⁷In 2008, his piece for the Whitney Biennial *Letter on the Blind for the Use of Those Who See* incorporated the observations of blind people describing an elephant for the first time.

According to InSite's executive director Michael Krichman, Téllez created "a sort of spectacle so out of the ordinary that officials did not see it as jeopardizing their everyday systems of control."⁴⁸ Because Téllez' piece works *within* the spectacle framework to reverse it, drawing the performance to the point of absurdity, the authorities it criticizes fail to recognize the potential threat to their system. Krichman's assessment of the piece as a stealth attack on the establishment exaggerated the extent to which Téllez' work subverted authority. InSite and Téllez not only cleared Smith's credentials with the U.S. government prior to the flight, but ensured in the first place that the stuntman was a U.S. citizen. While it is technically possible that no Mexican-born stuntmen were to be found, the fact remains that Smith's citizenship allowed Téllez and InSite to pass through bureaucratic hurdles far more easily than had he been a foreign national. The stuntman's citizenship is significant, because the performance could not have taken place as easily with a Mexican crossing the border. Téllez' gesture here is seemingly lighthearted, poking fun at the Anglo fear of illegal immigration. This mentality assumes that immigrants (particularly Mexican ones) will find any way possible to get into the United States, whether by crossing in the middle of the desert or being shot through the air over the fence.

Despite its striking visuals and novel concept, *One Flew Over the Void* failed when compared with earlier, genuinely subversive works such as the BAW/TAF's *End of the Line*. As I discussed in Chapter Three, *End of the Line* crossed not only the literal U.S.-Mexico border, but also the boundaries of legality. The artists and spectators moved fluidly across the line, without having cleared their actions with the authorities. In Téllez' piece, on the other hand, the "Mexican invasion" was ultimately kept at bay through U.S. border control procedures and the hardships of acquiring legal immigration documents. One finds meaning in the direction of the crossing as well – the human cannonball flies to the United States, rather than into Mexico. With the rise in narcoviolence, tourist kidnappings and infectious disease south of the border, migration *to* Mexico is decidedly unpopular. Entering Mexico requires no passport, no documentation of any kind, just a walk through a turnstile. Returning to the United States is far more of an "event."

⁴⁸Michael Krichman, quoted in *InSite.05* (2006), 425.

In all of these cases, *End of the Line* and *One Flew Over the Void*, as well as *The Cloud*, the artists worked with specific notions about the power of art. Although this concept is not unique to the border, it is most prevalent in this region. Each of these projects demonstrates a clear belief in the power of art to enact social change, a power that is harnessed through the symbolic gesture and the spectacle. In these cases, the situation on the U.S.-Mexico border is at the very least, a gross inequality and at the worst, a longstanding human rights violation. Border crossing deaths as well as narcoviolence (fueled by the persistent U.S. demand for illegal drugs) had increased in the twenty-first century.⁴⁹ These incidents, located on the periphery, have been easy to ignore and have long lost their shock value.

The U.S.-Mexico border, then, creates the conditions necessary for socially minded public art. Artists have engaged audiences on a symbolic level as long as there has been art, but the idea of the symbolic gesture is particularly apt for the border region. Forced with having to invoke the complexities of the border without delving into statistical and political explication, border artists began to specialize in creating indelible images that could incorporate an entire argument and drive political change. By the twenty-first century, the symbolic gesture had become one of the primary means by which border artists communicated social realities to the general public. In both cases, these strategies are introduced to the mainstream art world through the periphery of the border.

Jaar and Téllez used their InSite projects (and funding) to bring international politics and performance art together. Their methods are similar, down to the use of flying objects over the border. In fact, these tactics of symbolic gesture and spectacle can be found within each piece, but the underlying methods differ. Jaar's *Cloud* engaged the spectacle through the elaborate staging and the use of different artistic, musical and literary elements combined into a single event. The discursive apparatus of the piece, however, extended over time and space. For *The Cloud*, Jaar created an internal vocabulary of symbolism generated

⁴⁹The U.S. economic recession (as well as the Mexican economic downturn) has affected illegal border crossings, with a 17 percent decrease in the number of apprehensions in 2008 compared to the 2007 figures (from p. 3 of the 2008 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics available on the U.S. Department of Homeland Security website <http://www.dhs.gov/files/statistics/publications/yearbook.shtm>). For the purposes of this dissertation, the works described reference the pre-recession period. It remains to be seen whether the decrease in illegal crossing apprehensions will continue after the recession is over.

from and entirely cohesive within itself. In other words, Jaar's *Cloud* certainly courted the attention of a wide viewing public but was not dependent on this response for its meaning. The viewer may or may not choose to react to the human rights violations on the border, but this reaction (or lack thereof) has little effect on Jaar's piece.

Télez' *One Flew Over the Void* also utilized symbolic imagery, but the focus of the work is on the interaction between the piece and the viewing public. The audience must react to the spectacle of the man flying over the border and the sheer absurdity of such a crossing. It is the interplay of this reaction (shock, bemusement, exhilaration) with the spectacular event itself that comprises the work as a whole. By distilling the complexities of site and U.S.-Mexico relations into these easily digested approaches, twenty-first century border art successfully navigates the territory of social and political change.

The symbolic gesture and the spectacle are but two of the tactics used to connect the political and the aesthetic at the U.S.-Mexico border. A third, highly active contingent of artists and activists (or "artivists", to use Chicano artist Mario Torero's term) turned away from mainstream art production almost entirely in favor of grassroots social organization. Although InSite_05 funded several similar projects, most grassroots community organizers engage the site on an entirely different level, down to that of the neighborhood, street, or apartment building. The U.S.-Mexico border tends to figure only as an abstract concept, or, in the view of Luis Ituarte's quoted earlier, as yet another bureaucratic institution. These collectives tend to operate on traditional principles of community involvement, however, tending not to mix aesthetics and politics in a single piece. The scope of any given project is also narrower; rather than addressing international relations, these groups focus on issues pertaining to a specific section of the community, issues that can be addressed with a petition, strike or demonstration. In any case, since these grassroots tactics do not enter the art world, they fall beyond the scope of this discussion.

So far this chapter has considered only the art of the San Diego-Tijuana region. Another set of paired cities on the U.S.-Mexico border has also generated a significant amount of art dealing with the border as site. El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, the industrial heart of the borderlands, engendered a particular kind of performance art shaped by a rising

tide of violence. In Ciudad Juárez, the violence caused by narcotrafficking coupled with escalating attacks on female *maquiladora* workers has affected the production, reception, and communication of ideas through border art. Artists dealing with the region have had to navigate this fraught territory without resorting to fetishization of violence.

Juárez was originally of the most prosperous cities along the border due to the industrial buildup from U.S. corporations. Since 1964, more than three hundred *maquiladoras*, or factories, were constructed within the city limits as a result of the Mexican government's Border Industrial Program (BIP). Under a series of binational agreements, U.S. corporations could now manufacture goods in Mexico virtually duty-free, paying a fraction of the wages that U.S. laborers would require. By the 1990s, crossing from El Paso to Juárez became a commonplace event, as more than eighty percent of the El Paso population had relatives living across the border.⁵⁰ In 1994, however, the El Paso city government implemented Operation Blockade, the first step towards sealing off the urban downtown from unauthorized crossings.⁵¹ According to activist and human rights worker Kerry Doyle, "physically, it was a huge change on the border. And all of a sudden you see people who can't get across the border, they were pushed to the outskirts, and gradually over the years, with increased enforcement and increased fencing, and increased military tactics..."⁵²

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, conditions in Ciudad Juárez led to total militarization of the border on both sides, to the point where frequent travel advisories were issued to U.S. travelers. Many El Paso arts and educational institutions actively prevented their students and affiliates from crossing, citing liability concerns. With over eight thousand cartel-related deaths in 2007, the El Paso-Ciudad Juárez region was characterized as a "war-zone" by the U.S. media. Occurring simultaneously with this escalation were incidents of violence against women, specifically young female *maquiladora* workers. Since 1993, there had been more than one thousand unsolved murders of young women, termed

⁵⁰Michael Tomor, El Paso Museum of Art, Interview with the author, El Paso, TX, February 20, 2009. This statistic is somewhat corroborated by U.S. Census data that show over 80% of the El Paso population as being of "Hispanic" origin. The data, however, do not specify how many of these people are specifically of Mexican descent, and, more importantly, their family origins within Mexico.

⁵¹Kerry Doyle, University of Texas-El Paso Ruben Center for Contemporary Art, Interview with the author, El Paso, TX, April 20, 2009.

⁵²Doyle, Interview with the author (2009).

“femicidios” by the media, within the Juárez city limits. With these statistics, the city held Mexico’s highest murder rate during the 1990s and early 2000s, and the informal title of most dangerous city in North America. Although narcoviolence also increased simultaneously in cities of the U.S. interior, Juárez held a powerful position in the American (and Mexican) imagination as a lawless land, replete with drugs and violence.

Mexican artist Tania Candiani staged her 2009 *Battleground* performance in response to the particularities of the El Paso-Ciudad Juárez region, especially the looming threat of violence. The piece was part of efforts by the University of Texas El Paso’s (UTEP) Rubin Center (similar to InSite) to bring artists from outside the city to El Paso in order that they might respond to the specifics of the border region. For Candiani’s January 22 performance, the artist recruited two groups of female students, one from UTEP and the other from Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez (UACJ). Both groups of women were given household implements that were modified to become weapons. These tools were part of an earlier Candiani project entitled *Protección Familiar* (“Family Protection”) from 2004. Examples included metal colanders worn as helmets and brooms with their handles sharpened into spear points. In this way, Candiani turned the domestic sphere into the battleground, commenting on women’s dual roles as keeper and protector of the home in much of Latin America.

The items also, in the El Paso-Juárez context, evoked the *femicidios*. For the El Paso portion of the performance, the UTEP women posed with their weapons on a hillside overlooking Ciudad Juárez, while across the border, the Juárez University women were similarly posed, but inside an empty room. The actions of each group were streamed live to the other, so the UACJ women could watch those from UTEP and vice versa. The women stood motionless for an hour, and then proceeded, one by one, to lay down their weapons. Without resorting to sensationalism or a fetishization of violence prevalent in many twenty-first century border works, Candiani instead focused on the experience of women living in the border region. As with much of reality, the day-to-day existence of women in the Juárez-El Paso area is not so sensationalized as the news media and other commentators have made it seem. The reality of the border is much quieter, as was evident

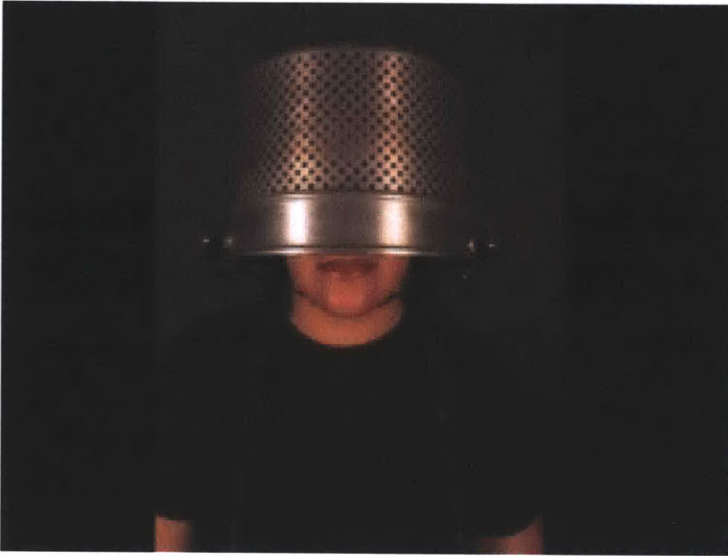


Figure 5-10: Tania Candiani, colander-helmet from *Protección Familiar* (2004). Image courtesy of the artist.

in the stillness of the piece. In this case, however, stillness does not imply contentment; rather, the performance was thick with tension.

The Rubin Center's Doyle worked with Candiani on the project, describing the end result as follows:

... the reason it was more accurate about the border reality was that the students here on this side of the border were at the opening reception, so they had people coming back and forth and a lot of drama around them and they were very excited, they felt the hour went really quickly. The students in Juárez were totally alone, they were simultaneously broadcast into the gallery space, but they were actually totally alone. And their perception of that time elapsing was actually that it took a very, very long time, that they felt that an hour just took forever, and afterwards they felt kind of exhausted and a little demoralized.⁵³

The unexpected consequence of the performance was, in fact, that it illustrated the reality of the border on both sides. In the case of *Battleground*, it is the discrepancy between the artist's intention and the actuality of the piece that provided a social commentary, and ultimately the space for social change.

⁵³Doyle, Interview with the author (2009).



Figure 5-11: Tania Candiani, *Battleground*, broom-spears on display at UTEP's Rubin Center (2009). Image courtesy of the artist.

For the women of El Paso, this tension was mitigated by the fact that the women were not alone. They posed on the hillside flanked by onlookers and members of the media. They were constantly aware that they were participants in an art project, and ultimately part of something larger. In Juárez, the solitude felt by the UACJ students mirrored the solitude felt by the city's inhabitants as a whole. The performance room became a prison rather than a shelter, much like the rest of Juárez. Cut off from mainstream Mexico and separated from the United States by the border, the city's residents have had to face their situation largely alone. Media attention focuses primarily on U.S.-centric sensationalism – U.S. embassy attacks, Anglo-American tourist kidnappings, the “war on drugs” – rather than the daily lives of those in Juárez.

In the twenty-first century El Paso-Juárez region, Candiani's performance was a rare example of contemporary cross-border collaboration. Many contemporary projects currently under development had been postponed or altered, including a binational collaboration born of Candiani's own workshops at UTEP. Besides UTEP's ban on student border crossing, there existed a sense of personal responsibility. An art performance on the Juárez side could possibly stimulate dialogue and enact change, but, more likely, it could create a new target for the violence – hence the enclosure of the Juárez University women. In this case, the artist assumes responsibility for the well-being of her collaborators.



Figure 5-12: Tania Candiani, *Battleground* (2009). This image shows the UTEP women on a hill in the United States facing Juárez in Mexico. Image courtesy of the artist.

Candiani's *Battleground* responded to these particularities of site by altering the means of cross-border communication. With the exception of Candiani, none of the women physically crossed the border, and the UACJ women were protected indoors, rather than exposed. On the U.S. side, the UTEP students faced Ciudad Juárez; they could see the city without any obstruction. The women became at once defenders guarding their way of life and attackers poised to fight. Candiani's piece negotiated this territory between attacker and defender, for art on the border is in a position to take on both roles.

The piece was inherently defensive, much like the U.S. military buildup along the El Paso-Juárez line. Defense is always cited as the justification for such militarization – an attempt to keep out the drugs, the violence, the human smuggling and other atrocities committed on the border. At the same time, however, the performance was also an attack, for the very act of collaboration with Juárez defied the efforts of the cartels, the U.S. military and other forces to separate the two cities. *Battleground* served as an offensive strike that only art seems equipped to undertake.

This consideration of art and social change returns to the original trend observed in this chapter – border art's two directions in the post-Quincentennial, post-NAFTA era. Opening up the border region to a multitude of perspectives, beyond those of border-

dwellers, art of this period searched for ways to address socio-political issues while remaining aesthetically grounded. The two directions, however, are seemingly contradictory. What does it mean for U.S.-Mexico border art to move simultaneously away from and towards the physicality of the border?

I would argue that each of these directions opens up the border region to a more global discussion of international and intercultural relations. The portable border moves border art from being rooted in specific location, dealing with a particular set of issues, toward an open definition of border that allows anyone to contribute to the dialogue. InSite, on the other hand, is representative of an insistence on site-specificity – both a reaction to and a natural consequence of increased globalization and the opening-up of “border art.” The border may travel around the world, but for the inhabitants of the region, its presence is as solid as ever.

Chapter 6

Post-Border?

As this dissertation has argued, border art has initiated a broader dialogue with art about other international borders, especially works that address the subjects of migration, cultural mapping, diaspora, and transnationalism. This situation is not limited to the U.S.-Mexico border. Biennial culture has celebrated artists whose work considers these issues. Artists such as Palestinian-born Mona Hatoum extend the terms of border art to other regions around the globe. By taking into account the much earlier developments inaugurated by artists active in the U.S.-Mexico border region, we can understand Hatoum and her work within a larger border framework. Her 2006 *Hot Spot* “maps the whole world, everywhere and nowhere, simultaneously.”¹ The title is a play on geology (a literal volcanic “hot spot”) and geopolitics (contested sites).

Mapping is the consequence of an anxiety of home. The further away from it you move, the more you crave a return, and seek to configure it through recourse to a map or a thread that will lead you back to this point of origin. But the place is elusive; it will never be the same from the moment you leave it. There is no return. Instead, home is henceforth displaced, temporary, and defined in terms of where one is not.²

¹Mona Hatoum, *Mona Hatoum* (London: Jay Jopling/White Cube, 2006), 57.

²Ibid.

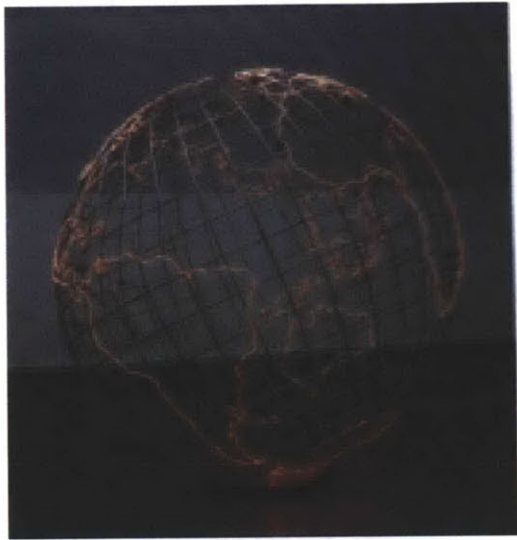


Figure 6-1: Mona Hatoum, *Hot Spot*. Image from *Mona Hatoum* (London: Jay Jopling/White Cube, 2006).

Hatoum describes the situation of the border dweller, which I mentioned in the introduction. Like Pico Iyer's description of the constant global traveler, Hatoum's persona reflects the nature of twenty-first century border crossings. Unlike Iyer jaded world citizen, however, Hatoum's works describe a more disjunctive scenario in which the comforts and familiarity of "home" can never be attained. This situation reflects reality for a different set of people, including political refugees and those displaced by natural phenomena. Hatoum's *Routes* series maps the world in terms of airline flight routes. Using maps provided by the airlines themselves, she colored the spaces between intersecting flight paths. The results are images that fragment the map, casting a wildly uneven grid, or even a net, over nations and continents. National boundaries are redrawn in terms of the flow of people from one place to another. Hatoum's work, and her characterization of the constant migrant, links closely with the situation of the Sydney Indochinese refugees chronicled in the BAW/TAF's 1992 biennial project, as well as many undocumented Mexican and Central American workers living in the United States. This state of being has also come to define the nomadic biennial artist as well.

Documenta XI, held in 2002, set out to encompass a global definition of borders and interrogate the twenty-first century nature of the term. Projects from Chantal Akerman and



Figure 6-2: Mona Hatoum, *Routes IV*. Image from *Mona Hatoum* (London: Jay Jopling/White Cube, 2006).

Pavel Braila explicitly made reference to international borders, while Indian-born artist Amar Kanwar showed his film, *A Season Outside* (1997), as part of the 2002 Documenta in Kassel, Germany. The film, a personal exploration of the separation of India and Pakistan, opened with a scene of the Wagah border closing ceremony.³ On the India-Pakistan border at Wagah is a ceremonial border crossing station. This city marks the only point at which the border opens.

Since 1959, each day concludes with a ceremonial lowering of the national flags. The performance, watched each evening by cheering crowds, centers on an exaggerated display of military pomp and circumstance.⁴ Pakistani and Indian guards stomp fiercely in choreographed mock aggression, and finally the two flags are lowered at the exact same rate. The performance concludes with quick handshakes all around and the closing of the

³The film was shown in other venues as well, including London's Whitechapel Art Gallery and New York's Peter Blum gallery. See David Shariatmadari, "Amar Kanwar," *Frieze* 110 (October 2007) available online at http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/amar_kanwar/, accessed March 27, 2011. Also Holland Cotter, "Art in Review – *A Season Outside*," *The New York Times*, February 20, 2004, available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/02/20/movies/art-in-review-amar-kanwar-a-season-outside.html>, accessed March 27, 2011.

⁴This ceremony also opens up the concept of border art. Are these soldiers actively engaged in the process of art-making? It would seem to be the case, as they clearly perform for an audience and exaggerate their gestures. There exist many other military ceremonies, however, which are not considered performance art. The changing of the guards at Buckingham Palace, is one well-known example, as are the ceremonies at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Washington D.C.



Figure 6-3: Border closing ceremony at Wagah. Image from Flickr.



Figure 6-4: Border closing ceremony at Wagah. Image available online at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/picturegalleries/theweekinpictures/5895283/The-week-in-pictures-24-July-2009.html?image=29>.

gates for the evening.⁵ The Wagah ceremony presents much for interpretation. The soldiers are engaged in a form of theater; their aggression is only a show, feigned for the pleasure of the audience. The “peace” is real, however – similar to the British royals’ changing of the guard.

Of importance is the fact that unlike Telléz’ *One Flew Over the Void*, Jaar’s *The Cloud*, or the BAW/TAF’s *End of the Line*, the Wagah ceremony is not one of border crossing, but of performative closing. By shutting the gates at the end of the day, the

⁵The video of the full performance is available online at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YeSX6AZ5xEI&feature=player_embedded. This link is not for Kanwar’s film, which is not available to be streamed over the Internet.

troops perform the border itself. This reflects the nature of the India-Pakistan border itself. It is not a porous postmodern situation, but a still-significant border, a closed-off boundary enforced by the military. The Wagah soldiers play out national aggressions on a human scale. Every evening, they re-enact the conflict of India and Pakistan, emphasizing the ideological and political gulf that separates them. The handshake at the end, coupled with the knowledge that these two sides are in fact in full cooperation, reveals the artifice of the ceremony and the border itself.



Figure 6-5: Border closing ceremony at Wagah. Image available online at http://www.japanfocus.org/-China_Hand-/2986.

The act of filming the ritual and displaying it as an artwork recast the Wagah ceremony in terms of the art world, as well as the culture of international art festivals. By documenting a border closing ceremony and presenting it at a Biennial, Kanwar made a statement about the nature of borders and their role in Documenta culture and art festivals in general. The art world has long mediated between the nationalism espoused by Venice and other biennials, and the postmodern borderless world promoted in such festivals as Documenta. This 2002 iteration of Documenta was dedicated to addressing many of the same issues that artists of the U.S.-Mexico border had examined since the 1980s.⁶ In this

⁶It is important to note that Kamar showed the film at Documenta XI, curated by Nigerian-born Okwui Enwezor, with the purpose of questioning how “contemporary art, as a ‘material reflection’ on the world, confronts the spectres of ‘unceasing cultural, social and political frictions, transitions, transformations, fissures and global institutional consolidations.’” Enwezor, quoted in Michael Stanley, “Documenta XI and the Global Culture” in the *LIP Magazine*, October 6, 2002, available online at <http://thelip.robertsharp.co.uk/?p=83>, accessed March 27, 2011.

way, the Indo-Pakistan ceremony enters into the larger dialogue of borders and boundaries. Waghah becomes linked with the U.S.-Mexico border, as another space to explore the border problematic.

This dissertation has explained how artists on the U.S.-Mexico border worked with ideas about the nature of art and politics, the role of art and the artist as agents of change. Artists Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla, in a series of projects about the island of Vieques, near Puerto Rico, achieved a measure of success in effecting such change. The



Figure 6-6: From Allora and Calzadilla, *Under Discussion* (2005). Image from <http://iangilesstudioimagebank.wordpress.com/2010/07/20/allora-and-calzadilla-boat-table-install/>.

image above, a still from a video, shows an upturned table in the middle of a brilliant blue-green sea. The table's legs are pointed towards the sky, and at one end, there is placed an outboard motor. We can see the table moving over the relatively calm water. The makeshift boat bears an unidentified man on a journey. This man, of indeterminate ethnicity and wearing nondescript clothing, faces away from the viewer. We cannot read his expression or his thoughts. This video was shown at the 2005 Venice Biennale as *Under Discussion*, the final in a series of projects by Allora and Calzadilla, produced in Vieques, Puerto Rico. Allora had been born and educated in the United States, while Calzadilla was born in Cuba but educated in both Puerto Rico and the United States. The two artists

had collaborated since meeting in 1995. Allora and Calzadilla's artworks from 1999 through 2005 attempt to capture the reality of the island's situation and its relationship with the United States.

Allora and Calzadilla's work with Puerto Rico, its island territory of Vieques, and the United States defines a different border, a border that is both invisible and porous, one that shifts depending on one's perspective and physical location. Although more difficult to "see," both literally and politically, this border affects the lives of over eight million people – roughly half in the United States and half in its island commonwealth. After considering how art located on the U.S.-Mexico border anticipated larger shifts, such as the integration of the North American markets, one can see a similar process at work with Allora and Calzadilla's consideration of Vieques. Their Vieques works took place over the course of four years, from 2001 (*Land Mark*) to 2005 (*Under Discussion*). During this time, Vieques, located off the East coast of Puerto Rico, went from being a U.S. naval base and bombing range to a populated island once again. The Navy relinquished the base in 2003 and returned the land to its original inhabitants. Though on a much smaller scale than the U.S.-Mexico situation, and dwarfed by the impact of NAFTA, this exchange of an island between the United States and Puerto Rico marked a significant shift in power.

Puerto Rican history is a record of two colonial influences, those of Spain and the United States, as well as several ethnic ones (Amerindian, African and Caribbean). The indigenous population of the island, consisting mostly of Taíno and Caribe Indians, was decimated following the arrival of Columbus in 1493. Following the conquest and its social and cultural upheaval, Puerto Rico stabilized under continued colonial rule.⁷ The Spanish designated the island for strategic as well as agricultural usage. Its climate and terrain did not lend themselves to large plantations fueled by an influx of slaves.⁸ As a result, U.S. interests in Puerto Rico were primarily military. John Quincy Adams described the

⁷Vincenzo Petruccio, *Puerto Rican Paradox*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1947), 126-131.

⁸Luis Martínez-Fernández, *Torn Between Empires: Economy, Society, and Patterns of Political Thought in the Hispanic Caribbean 1840-1878*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1994) 111. Slavery in Puerto Rico peaked with only 77,000 documented individuals, as opposed to more than 700,000 in Cuba. The quality of Puerto Rican sugar and coffee was considered inferior to those produced in Cuba. When combined with Cuba's larger size, it is clear to see why the Spanish did not spend a tremendous amount of resources developing the smaller island for plantation-based agriculture.

Caribbean in terms of his “ripe apple” dictum, whereby Cuba, Puerto Rico and the other islands would ripen and fall naturally into the waiting arms of the United States once the right conditions arose.⁹ Adams “epitomized the prevailing anti-Hispanic sentiment” among U.S. leaders of the time.¹⁰ This sentiment grew until the 1898 Spanish-American War, when Congress authorized McKinley to “evict the Spanish.”¹¹ At this point, Puerto Rico came definitively under the control of the United States.

The Foraker Law of 1900 classified the status of Puerto Rico: “the acquired territories cannot be states because they were not prepared for statehood, nor can they be territories, because that implies statehood down the road. Instead, they will have the character of mere ‘possessions’ or parts of the US.”¹² By 1912, the Jones Act granted Puerto Ricans citizenship, although as residents of a territory, they were unable to participate in elections.¹³ On July 3, 1950, Public Law 600 was enacted, allowing Puerto Rico to be granted commonwealth status. As a commonwealth, the island was to create and organize a constitutional government, which became law in 1952.¹⁴ The Jones Act, and later Public Law 600, opened the door for the flow of U.S. federal funds to the island. But without the expansion of voting rights, Puerto Rican scholars could view the flow of federal aid as little more than a “weapon for the continuation of colonialism.”¹⁵ U.S. attitudes toward Puerto Rico have historically emphasized the island’s “otherness.” In 1901, Puerto Rico was defined by the U.S. Supreme Court as “foreign to the United States in a domestic sense.”¹⁶ This statement is, in essence, a paradox, referring to a “possession” as “foreign,” a stateless

⁹Ibid, 11-12.

¹⁰Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy Towards Latin America*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 5.

¹¹Ibid, 139. “splendid little war”

¹²Manuel Maldonado-Denis, *Puerto Rico: A Socio-Historic Interpretation*, trans. Elena Vialo. (New York: Random House, 1972), 90.

¹³Ibid, 102

¹⁴Ibid, 194-199.

¹⁵Ibid, 123. Manuel Maldonado-Denis’ (independentist) ideological bias shows through in this statement. Puerto Ricans in support of statehood do not consider their relationship with the United States as a colonial one.

¹⁶Jorge Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 1. Duany quotes the U.S. Supreme Court decision handed down in the “Insular Cases,” which spanned the period of 1901 through 1922. These cases concerned the territories acquired in the Spanish-American War, including the classification of foreign nationals subsumed into the fledgling U.S. “empire.” With regards to Puerto Rico, the Supreme Court considered the island’s inhabitants to have no Constitutional Rights.

nation that would never be assimilated into the U.S. mainstream. As with the U.S.-Mexico border, Puerto Rico's history illustrates sustained cultural contact between United States and a part of Latin America. Because of the island's peculiar political situation, however, it often functions as an "other" also within Latin America. Not fully part of the United States, but too "Americanized" for Latin America, Puerto Rico was subject to more U.S. influence than any of its Caribbean neighbors.

Geographer Karen Schmelzkopf describes the particulars of Puerto Rico in relationship to the United States:

While there are no customs agents or visa requirements when Puerto Ricans cross into the U.S. mainland, the effects of these 'imaginary' borders are quite real and are permeable only in accordance with the colonial restrictions set up by the U.S.. Their statutory citizenship can be revoked at any time.¹⁷

Schmelzkopf reveals that the border between the United States and Puerto Rico operates very differently from true international boundaries. This "imaginary" border is mental, cultural, and, more intriguingly, hidden from view. Unlike the U.S.-Mexico border, no 2,000-mile fence divides the United States from Puerto Rico (although almost 2,000 nautical miles separate the two); migration from the island to the mainland is completely uninhibited. U.S. cultural stereotypes and attitudes towards Puerto Rican migration are also significantly different from those toward Mexico and the rest of Latin America. As a result, Puerto Ricans often move back and forth between the U.S. mainland and the island, maintaining a network of friends and family in both locations. The movement of people from Puerto Rico to the United States and back again has been well documented as "a transient and pendulous flow, rather than as a permanent relocation of people."¹⁸ Particularly robust are movements to New York City and back, resulting in the term "Nuyorican" to describe New York-based Puerto Ricans. Puerto Ricans also set up permanent enclaves in such cities as Orlando and Chicago. Characterized at other times as "circular migration," this movement

¹⁷Karen Schmelzkopf, "Scale and Narrative in the Struggle for Environment and Livelihood in Vieques, Puerto Rico," *Contentious Geographies: Environmental Knowledge, Meaning, Scale*, Michael K. Goodman, Maxwell T. Boykoff and Kyle T. Evered, eds. (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2008), 134.

¹⁸Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move* (2002), 2.

generates a porous border zone between Puerto Rican and Nuyorican communities. This zone is continually crossed and transgressed.¹⁹ This state of flux has come to define the status of Puerto Rico (and Puerto Ricans) in relation to the United States.

Such observations corroborate Arjun Appadurai's theory that the diaspora²⁰ (in this case, the Asian Indian diaspora in the United States) has developed into a "transnation, which retains a special ideological link to a putative place of origin but is otherwise a thoroughly diasporic collectivity."²¹ Writing about the Filipino "transnation," theorist Filomeno V. Aguilar, Jr. characterizes the concept in terms of two divergent identities:

At one end is celebration of the unhinging of patriotic attachments to a slice of territory and of the emancipatory possibilities of discursive post-national forms of allegiance. At the other end is lamentation over the inauthentic and unethical selves of long distance nationalists not bound by the rights, duties and accountabilities of territorially bounded citizenship.²²

When considered in the context of Puerto Rican nationalism (or "transnation"-alism), Aguilar's "lamentation" calls to mind Puerto Ricans living in the U.S. mainland while agitating for independence. Without the immediacy of living on the island, and with the privileges of U.S. citizenship and residency, these *independentistas* exaggerate the differences between U.S. and Puerto Rican cultures. Appadurai's idea of the "transnation," insists upon an "ideological link" to its putative origins. This ideology is found in Puerto Rican insistence upon culture in place of national sovereignty.

¹⁹Ibid, 33.

²⁰Diaspora originally referred to Jewish settlements outside of Palestine – Jews living dispersed among the Gentile population. The term has since evolved to encompass such phenomena as the African Diaspora, people of African ancestry living in North America and the Caribbean. In general, Latin America is not viewed as a Spanish diaspora, but rather a mixture of European, indigenous and African cultures (*mestizaje*). In most cases, the term "diaspora" assumes a particular cultural or religious resistance to assimilation. The word also assumes a kind of unwillingness or catastrophic scattering, beyond the control of the individuals affected. Nonetheless, one can consider Puerto Rican neighborhoods on the U.S. mainland, or *barrios*, to be diasporic communities, linked to the island culturally, but otherwise separate.

²¹Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), quoted also in Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move* (2002), 29.

²²Filomeno V. Aguilar, Jr. "Is there a Transnation? Migrancy and the National Homeland Among Overseas Filipinos," in *State/Nation/Transnation: Perspectives on Transnationalism in the Asia-Pacific*, Brenda S. A. Yeoh and Katie Willis, eds. (Psychology Press, 2004), 95.

This steadfast defense of culture at the expense of political power merits further exploration. In anthropologist Jorge Duany's formulation, insistence upon "the Spanish language and other icons of Hispanic heritage serves to unite against U.S. imperialism."²³ This cultural defense accounts for the insistence upon Latin American identity by Puerto Ricans born and raised on the U.S. mainland, including such festivals as New York City's "Puerto Rican Day" parade. The exaggeration of difference between cultures draws a boundary itself and claims certain spaces. As Duany states, nationalism in Puerto Rico has set up an "artificial binary" between American and Puerto Rican cultures.²⁴ Here, the most important word is "artificial."²⁵ The differences between the United States and Puerto Rico are exaggerated, outlined and reinforced by both sides in contrast to the perceived North American cultural hegemony.

Cultural anthropologist Juan Flores characterized this particular ideological stance as "[w]hatever stands to defy/deny the norms imposed by the reigning colonial power, or acts to transform them, emerges as a definitive and distinctive feature of the national culture."²⁶ It is important to note that Flores, writing about Puerto Rico, uses the term "national" to define the commonwealth's culture. In Chapter Two, I discussed the paradox of the Mexican (and Latin American) concept of Aztlán, the mythical nation without a state. Puerto Rican nationalism displays a similar paradox. The island "nation," never without its external overlords for over five hundred years, continues to display an exuberant nationalism. To complicate this "nationalism" even further, the current residents of Puerto Rico can claim almost no ancestral ties to the island's original Taíno inhabitants. Yet in the present day, it is the image of the Taíno fiercely resisting the European invasion that produces the idea of "difference" from the United States.

To complicate the U.S.-Puerto Rico situation further, the island of Vieques constitutes an internal border within both the United States and Puerto Rico itself. Vieques, a small, twenty-one mile island off the southeast coast of Puerto Rico, was originally an insu-

²³Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move* (2002), 14.

²⁴Ibid, 19.

²⁵"Artificial" implies that Puerto Rico would be far more "Americanized" than other Latin American nations if not for a conscious effort to maintain this difference.

²⁶Juan Flores, "National Culture and Migration: Perspectives from the Puerto Rican Working Class," *Divided Borders: Essays on Puerto Rican Identity*, 111.

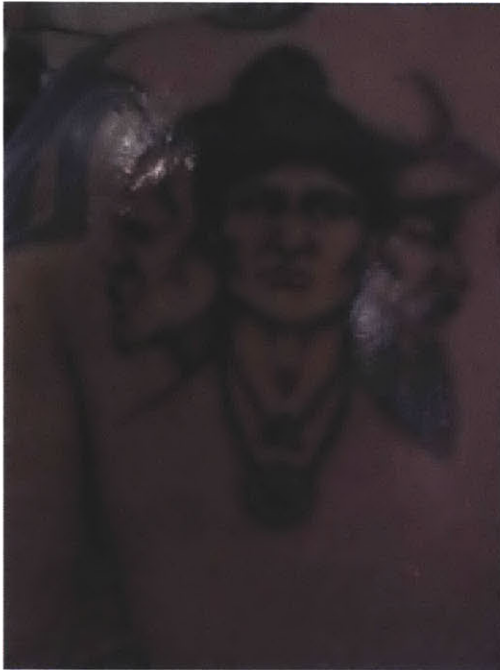


Figure 6-7: Puerto Rican “national” sporting a tattoo showing “la Raza,” an African head to the left, a Spaniard to the right, and the Taíno in the center. Image from Flickr.

lar community, yet also open to the sea-faring world, home to generations of fishermen.²⁷ In 1941, the United States established an 899-acre naval base on the island, relocating the area’s inhabitants and stunting the growth of tourism.²⁸ Craters scarred the landscape, and ecologists lamented the irreversible damage to the fragile ecosystem.²⁹ Public health officials also raised the issue of disease and the effects on the Viequeses still occupying a small portion of the island. Protestors and others against the military occupancy noted that the “people of Vieques suffer from high levels of cancer and other serious diseases such as Scleroderma, Lupus, thyroid deficiencies and asthma which they attribute to the U.S.

²⁷The people of Vieques are of a similar ethnic background as other Puerto Ricans. Vieques, however, developed a strong insular culture that was maintained throughout the U.S. Naval occupation.

²⁸Katherine T. McCaffrey, *Military Power and Popular Protest: The U.S. Navy in Vieques, Puerto Rico* (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 37.

²⁹The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) noted a high level of the toxic compound DDT in several of the bombing sites (Matthew S. Kendall, Laurie J. Bauer, Anthony S. Pait, David R. Whittall, John S. Burke, and Andrew L. Mason “An ecological examination of the marine resources of Vieques” NOAA, 2009). Also, an unpublished report by the University of Puerto, Mayagüez examined carcinogenic compounds found in Vieques (Massol, A. and Diaz E. Unpublished report. *Biomagnificación de Metales Carcinógenos en el Tejido de Cangrejos de Vieques Puerto Rico*, Casa Pueblo Adjuntas: UPR, Mayagüez).

Navy's acknowledged use of napalm, depleted uranium and other toxic materials on the island."³⁰ On the other hand, the island proved to be extremely valuable to the Navy. As the only U.S. island to have a bombing range, Naval officials declared Vieques "the crown jewel of training areas..."³¹ The base vividly staged the conflict between military technology and nature, and between military and civilian interests.

Vieques also occupied boundaries in the Puerto Rican consciousness: a solidification of the imaginary border between the United States and Puerto Rico, the island served as a constant reminder of modern colonialism. No matter how many rights Puerto Ricans achieved, no matter how close the vote for statehood became, the issue of Vieques served to magnify the powerlessness of the commonwealth in the face of U.S. hegemony.³² Military and civilian boundaries gave the Navy authority over residents of Puerto Rico. According to Schmelzkopf, "by constructing scale through this national and now global security perspective, the Navy effectively erased Vieques as a place."³³ The military controversy reached its apex in 1999, when an off-course bomb accidentally killed David Sanes, a civilian walking by the naval training area.

Sanes had enacted a border crossing of his own, moving from Puerto Rico to Vieques, and then to the naval training ground itself. Much like the perilous U.S.-Mexico border crossings in the Sonoran desert, the consequence of this transgression was death. This incident ignited a wave of protest throughout the population of Puerto Rico, as well as the four million Puerto Ricans living on the U.S. mainland. Sanes, however, was engaging in an act of protest. Human presence on the bombing ranges was supposed to trigger a warning system, effectively ceasing maneuvers. Protestors, simply by walking on the Naval territory, could disrupt the system.

³⁰Raúl Duany, "Vieques Controversy Turns Political," *Hispanic Magazine*, June 2001. Available online at <http://www.puertorico-herald.org/issues/2001/vol15n24/VqControversy-en.html>, accessed March 23, 2011.

³¹Schmelzkopf, "Scale and Narrative in the Struggle for Environment and Livelihood in Vieques, Puerto Rico" (2008), 134. Quoting Naval training manual.

³²Although many U.S. states contain Naval bases and bombing ranges, the key issue with Puerto Rico was that the island's residents, because of their inability to vote, had no say in the matter.

³³Schmelzkopf, "Scale and Narrative in the Struggle for Environment and Livelihood in Vieques, Puerto Rico" (2008), 133.

The acts of protestors, as well as the death of Sanes, inspired the artists Allora and Calzadilla to commence a series of artworks on the subject of Vieques. The artists, who live and work in Puerto Rico, brought the discourse of site-specificity and portability that originated on the U.S.-Mexico border to the Puerto Rico-Vieques situation. They described their works in terms of “globalization.”

Many people of our generation don't like "antiglobalization"—the word, its uses and abuses. After all, globalization is a condition of our world. You're part of this whether you want to be or not. So as artists we deal with globalization because we feel we have to, and because it's impossible not to. We come out of a new consciousness that emerged after the protests against global capital at the end of the '90s, but our work is not antiglobalist. Rather, we want a different idea of globalization, one that suggests new ways to confront, respond to, and act in the world.³⁴

This “different idea of globalization,” responds to the increasing tendency towards economic integration that marked the end of the twentieth century. I argue that it bears a close resemblance to the ways that artists at the U.S.-Mexico border had earlier interpreted the effects of NAFTA, undocumented immigration, and U.S. outsourcing during the 1990s.

Schnorr, Gómez-Peña, Avalos and the other border artists, discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, were not “antiglobalist,” but were confronting certain cultural realities of the sited and portable border condition, similarly to Allora and Calzadilla. The latter artists, however, were shaped by the late 1990s antiglobalization protests, while it was the 1970s social protest and Chicano rights movements that formed the political inspiration for the earlier generation of border artists. In other words, Allora and Calzadilla specifically cite the antiglobalization movement as a means to question the nature of globalization. Gómez-Peña and the other border artists used the 1970s social protest movements in a similar manner, to re-interrogate the essentialism of the border.

In 2001, Allora and Calzadilla staged the first of their three Vieques pieces, *Land Mark*. Collaborating with local protestors, the artists designed rubber soles that were to

³⁴Hans-Ulrich Obrist, “Allora and Calzadilla Talk about Three Pieces in Vieques,” *Artforum International* 43, March 2005.

attach to shoes. Each sole was molded with images and messages written (in reverse) by the individual protestors, so that a readable imprint would remain on the sand, an ephemeral message for those who followed. Allora and Calzadilla linked the very act of walking with civil disobedience and the transgression of boundaries:

In Vieques, whenever the military was about to bomb, the authorities would make a public announcement, and the area would be completely surrounded by military police to keep people out. If someone got in—the military had infrared sensors to detect body heat—then by law the bombing had to stop. So civil disobedience consisted of a simple act: entering the space. To walk, in the context of this geography, took on a much denser meaning. To leave an index or a trace in the sand was to contest, to refuse, and to critically disrupt the “official” meaning of that site.³⁵

In this way, not only did *Land Mark* cross the lines between installation, sculpture and performance art, but also explored the boundary between art and activism. The rubber soles function as sculpture, fashion and design, while the act of walking around the base – protesting – is a performance in itself. Finally, the piece left evidence of its transgression, footprints in the sand that “spoke” to their purpose.

This beach performance echoes those on the U.S.-Mexico border, including the BAW/TAF’s *End of the Line*. Four years later, Téllez would use a beach setting to very different effect. His circus-like *One Flew Over the Void* relied upon human presence to generate a spectacle, while Allora and Calzadilla’s *Land Mark* negotiated the poetics of absence. Absence is also felt in the images of *Land Mark*, staged to show only the footprints, rather than the protestors creating them. This documentation marked an important step in the conceptual maturation of border art.

This image in particular conveys an absence, which will itself be wiped away by the waves or weather, much like Michael Schnorr’s Imperial Beach sand pyramids three decades earlier. The footprints testify to the presence of human beings, but these protestors exist only in a limited temporal realm. Their absence, in turn, signifies the desolation of Vieques,

³⁵Allora and Calzadilla, quoted in Obrist, “Allora and Calzadilla Talk about Three Pieces in Vieques” (2005).



Figure 6-8: Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla, *Land Mark*, 2001. Image from <http://www.pbs.org/art21/slideshow/?slide=1416&showindex=73>

the fact that generations of Puerto Ricans (to say nothing of the Taíno) had been unable to occupy the land.

In 2003, capitulating to such popular acts of dissent as well as the protestations of Puerto Rico's government, the U.S. military pulled out of Vieques and permanently decommissioned the naval base. Allora and Calzadilla commemorated the occasion in 2004, with their video piece *Returning a Sound*:

Its main protagonist is a civil disobedient who is driving a moped around the newly opened, former military occupied areas of the island. . . as he drives around the landscape where his grandparents once lived and which is now marked by bomb craters, munitions storage facilities and signs everywhere stating "danger unexploded ordinance" his moped emits a resounding trumpet call.³⁶

The moped driver moves briskly through the streets of seemingly unpopulated towns and verdant landscapes, his expression calm and unchanging. As he revs the engine, the pitch

³⁶Jennifer Allora, Guillermo Calzadilla and Beatrix Ruf, *Allora and Calzadilla* (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2010), 6.

of the trumpet attached to the exhaust pipe changes perceptibly. The driver passes freely through the deserted bombing range; its warning signs rendered impotent. He ends his journey at the starting point; the trumpet sputters into silence. The iconography of the piece comes from the biblical story of Jericho, where the Israelite army was divinely instructed to circle the city of Jericho seven times while blowing their trumpets. At that moment, “it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat...and they took the city.”³⁷ Allora and Calzadilla’s trumpet blast, generated from the moped, acts in a similar manner, recalling the ongoing Puerto Rican struggle against the U.S. military, and equating the protestors’ actions with those of the Israelites conquering a seemingly undefeatable foe.

Also significant is the use of a moped, rather than human beings or another type of vehicle, to spread the trumpet call. The sound is generated from the exhaust pipe of the moped, which renders an automated, machine-like call, rather than issuing from the mouths and lungs of individuals. The following stills from the video illustrate the attachment of the trumpet and the setup of the moped:

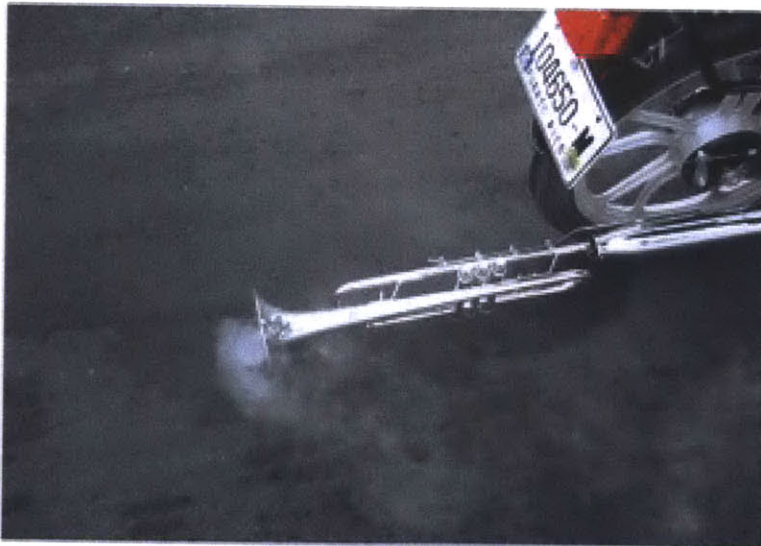


Figure 6-9: Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla, still from *Returning a Sound* (2004). Image from <http://www.pbs.org/art21/slideshow/?slide=1419&showindex=250>

³⁷ *King James Bible*, Joshua 1:6.



Figure 6-10: Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla, still from *Returning a Sound* (2004). Image from <http://bombsite.com/issues/109/articles/3333>

The artists stressed the importance of the machine-made sound, stating that “we preferred the more open set of associations [of] *antiphonos*, meaning sounding in answer, or in return. . . the trumpet sometimes sounds like an ambulance, an alarm, or Morse code—even experimental salsa.”³⁸ Here, the trumpet returns a sound, a complement to the cacophonous bomb drops that had once dominated the island. The moped in Puerto Rico signifies a low-cost vehicle for the working classes, rather than the enclosed (and air-conditioned) cars the upper classes want for the tropical Puerto Rican climate.

We can now better understand *Under Discussion*, the third of Allora and Calzadilla’s Vieques series. The man on the floating table-boat is a descendent of Viequense fishermen, returning from the main island of Puerto Rico to his ancestral home. He is also seen in the video exploring other contested island territories. *Under Discussion* bears a resemblance to *Returning a Sound*; both videos emphasize constant motion with unconventional conveyance. Sound is emphasized throughout both films, from the undulating pitch of the trumpet to the drone of the conference table’s outboard motor.

³⁸Allora and Calzadilla, quoted in Obrist, “Allora and Calzadilla Talk about Three Pieces in Vieques” (2005).

The piece's title, *Under Discussion*, and the iconography of the "conference" table, refer to the fact that the fate of these islands was, as of 2005, under discussion, in talks between the United States and the local government of Puerto Rico. Even though the military had cleared Vieques, the aftereffects of its occupancy were still felt in the ecosystem, the landscape, and in residual health effects suffered by the island's inhabitants. The upturned conference table, skimming across the water, is an intentionally absurd visual, one meant to exaggerate the discrepancy between the U.S. government officials in charge of the island and the Viequenses. This man is, in effect, driving the discussion to its source, reducing the distance between the zone of contention and those who decide its fate.

In a similar way, Allora and Calzadilla drive this discussion back to the idea of post-autonomous art, discussed in relation to the BAW/TAF in Chapter 3. The Vieques projects are far from post-autonomous, in fact, they are produced primarily for art world consumption, documented in striking photographs and beautifully shot videos. Allora and Calzadilla also managed to produce tangible change, a product no less significant and, I argue, no less relevant to that same art world audience.³⁹ These projects managed to distill a complex debate about the ownership of an island territory, including the 500-year history of Spanish and U.S. colonialism, into a series of vignettes that spoke to the general public. In the end, it was this public protest that persuaded the U.S. Navy to leave the island.

Allora and Calzadilla's works both literalize the border as a zone of negotiation, and reveal border art in its current, fluid, post-border condition. The conceptual shifts necessary to render the U.S.-Mexico border portable also enabled other artists to bring these newly conceptualized discourses to other regions. In the case of the United States and Puerto Rico, the border is cultural rather than physical, but it remains a border all the same. One can consider Allora and Calzadilla's works not as border crossings, but as art that attempts to define and to subvert a border region where none exists physically. Although the island is, in actuality, bordered by the sea, Puerto Ricans are free to travel to the United States

³⁹It is telling that Allora and Calzadilla, once "border artists" working to benefit a small, nondescript island, one that most U.S. citizens have never visited or heard of, had in 2011 been selected to represent the United States at the Venice Biennale. In this manner, border art becomes the face of the nation.

to work and live.⁴⁰ As I described earlier, though, Puerto Rican culture sets up its own “island” with borders inside mainstream U.S. society. Allora and Calzadilla’s pieces mine this border within a border by exploring the island of Vieques. There exist borders between the United States and Puerto Rico, Puerto Rico and Vieques, military and civilians, nature and development. Allora and Calzadilla’s pieces interrogate the nature of these divisions, testing them to reveal their physical and intangible characteristics.

Border art in the contact zone between the United States and Mexico allowed for an opening up of the definition of “border,” ultimately leading to ideas of portability. At the same time, the portable border expanded the category of “border art” to include not only projects situated on these international boundaries, but also art that addressed notions of intercultural contact, migration, “transnation” and even transgression of established norms. Allora and Calzadilla’s work benefits from this thickening and expansion of border art; the Vieques pieces are hyper-local in their initial scope but broadly global in their outlook and art world circulation. These pieces allow an exploration of U.S. territorial disputes and the contact zone between the military and civilians in Vieques. *Under Discussion* in particular changes the terms of the conversation to include contested territories around the world. If this Viequense fisherman can return to his home, perhaps he can pilot his table-boat anywhere, spreading these ideas far beyond the island.

⁴⁰While legal residents of the island, Puerto Ricans cannot vote for U.S. President. When they cross to the mainland and set up residence, however, Puerto Ricans enjoy the full privileges of U.S. citizenship.

Chapter 7

Epilogue

Border art, whether on the U.S.-Mexico border or elsewhere, opens up another means to categorize art and, ultimately, art historical inquiry. There is enormous potential in thinking of art in terms of change rather than objects. Even when socially motivated artists generate an aesthetic product, such as Allora and Calzadilla's photographs, the BAW/TAF's performance videos and installations, or even the Chicano Park murals, the object is only part of the whole. It is not that the physical product ceases to matter, but that it coexists with the post-autonomous art project. The challenge this dissertation has posed is to consider the intangible aspects of these projects as carefully as the visual record.

Future directions for this research involve bringing border art, as well as an ever-dynamic version of Mignolo's "border thinking," to the discipline of art history. How can studying the U.S.-Mexico border, the literal margin of the U.S. art world, bring about a reevaluation of mainstream art and culture? What has been the case for Mexico, and what can the rest of Latin America contribute to the dialogue? How has "border thinking" become productive for other hybrid cultural situations, such as Puerto Rico (which becomes "American" at the 2011 Venice Biennale). Ultimately, it remains to be seen if these ideas can carry into a larger, global context. I would argue that they do, that the study of border art has tremendous implications for the study of the relationship between the United States/Europe and Latin America, as well as providing a new dimension to the study of

American art. Beyond this regionalism, though, what does theorizing the border add to art history in general?

Examining the historical development of border art allows for a theoretical examination of art historiography. As with any discipline, art history continues to construct itself by setting up borders. Whether geographical or temporal, there are clear dividing lines between movements and cultures, language groups and “periods,” media and art forms; art history is still defined by this logic. This dissertation suggests that, beyond the study of the U.S. and Mexico, the study of “border art” can be used to rethink art history *from* its borders. From this vantage point, the “borders” of art history become precisely the points at which different geographical, temporal, and cultural spaces can be seen to meet, with art that has often been dismissed or “marginalized” because of its literally hybrid form. But reframing these hybrids as central to a new way of thinking, from contemporary border art production to other instances of intercultural contact – *mudéjar* architecture in Spain, for example - the idea of borders can be used to rethink more traditional periods of art history. Rather than attempting to erase those boundaries, this line of thinking looks at the lively space between them – offering the potential for a complete reinvention of the traditional narratives of art history.

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