CULTURE, ART, AND THE TRANSBORDER CONDITION/EXPERIENCE:

MARCOS RAMÍREZ ERRE’S ART PRACTICES

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to Marcos Isaac Ramírez and to my son Diako, along with all the other transborder children whose life experiences mark the future of Tijuana/San Diego and whose collective narratives are the story of the evolution of borderlands.

Additionally, I dedicate it to my parents Rowshanak Tabrizy and Abdollah “Khosrow” Solaimani, along with so many other parents, who crossed countless borders in their possibilities of being in search of better for their children. You thought you did it so that we wouldn’t have to, but understand that we want to experience the crossing for ourselves. Thank you for paving the way and don’t be afraid of the outcome.
…In the Protean reality of America, artists constantly remind us of the resonance and wonder of the multifarious world we inhabit. A place of hope and transformation where nothing is too wonderful to be true…
—Tomás Ybarra Frausto
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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by
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Master of Arts in Chicana and Chicano Studies
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Home to individuals from countless walks of life, and geographically and historically placed in a critical social, economic, and political crossroads of the globe, the Mexico-United States border region is a unique space that engenders a highly complex, multidimensional culture, typified by tension, crisis and dynamism. Within this culture, contemporary art practices have collectively formed a mélange of novel creative articulations of the Border, characterized by asymmetry and disproportionate power relations. Anthropological work by contemporary scholars concludes that Tijuana is the largest, and arguably the most dynamic and conflictive city on the Border. As many theorists such as Nestor Garcia-Canclini and Norma Iglesias Prieto have observed, artists increasingly act as agents for raising awareness and promoting social change in times of socioeconomic crisis, a dynamic which can be observed clearly in Tijuana.

As a case study, this thesis explores the professional trajectory of artist Marcos Ramírez ERRE, who, due to his own subjective condition/experiences, as well as his capacity to connect local concerns to the greater global context, has achieved local and international recognition. Looking at the themes, placement and media of Ramírez’s pieces serves as a contextual map within which to understand art’s advantage of fluidity and candidness in its strife to challenge impositions of physical and metaphorical borders. For example, viewing the border as a limit or a barrier underpins its immigration law enforcement function, in contrast with more progressive perspectives of the Border as a cultural meeting place, and an opportunity to better understand external and internal “others.” The latter view naturalizes the complex transborder conditions explained next. Inspired by the spirit of Iglesias Prieto’s operational dedication to define the global transborder condition that marks the lives of many, I re-appropriate it for the purposes of this research. Transborder indicates a position of being present between two worlds. It is a collective product of distinct transborder experiences—crossings for myriad purposes that require careful consideration and negotiation of the border, that entail creativity and strategy, and that are inevitably affected by its physical construct and imposition.
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I would also like to thank Marcos Ramírez ERRE for producing the kind of art that crosses borders of rhetoric and grants us full access to follow in our public and virtual spaces. The eye-opening experience of crossing borders has contributed to a deeper understanding of the factors that hold a common reality in place, and what I, as a student of Chicana/o Studies can learn that challenges this notion of reality.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The modern concept of borders has roots in ideas of nation state, sovereignty, and control of flows of capital, goods, and people. On the ground, borders have meant the reinforcement of canons and the concepts of exclusivity to the disadvantage of others and elitism as well as other human constructs in the context of the reorganization of the world based on the interests of those in power.

Borders and the issues they tend to generate have commonly been hot-button areas of debate for (im)migrants, sociologists, writers, political scientists, artists, economists, politicians, law enforcement bodies, and educational institutions among others. The reason for this is rooted in part in the controversial nature of the process of establishing and enforcing geopolitical borders, as well as the extension of the definition of border into internal and imagined spaces. Receiving special attention for its rich cultural dynamic, the Mexico-United States Border at Tijuana/San Diego has been represented in a variety of different ways over the course of its decades in existence. In the past couple of decades, largely due to Mexican writers who looked critically at the border, it has been increasingly debated as a geopolitical and symbolic third space (Anzaldúa, 1987; Appadurai, 1996; Lefebvre, 1974; Soja, 1996), or a space in which experience takes its rightful place of importance along with physical conditions and logical arguments. Hugo Crosthwaite, Teddy Cruz, Michael Dear, ERRE, inSITE, Iglesias Prieto, Rene Peralta, Manuel Valenzuela, and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto are some who have spoken to this transcendent and resilient power of the individual human experience.

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1 In the current state of the Department of Homeland Security. Geopolitical refers to the: combination of geographic and political factors relating to or influencing a nation or region.

2 For example, metaphorical borders such as the idea of the imaginary, or the possibility of metaphysical concepts of reality
This research looks at the relationship between art practices within the third space of the border, and interpretations of appropriately termed transborder condition/experience of people in and around the region whose lives have been indisputably marked by its physical presence. Transborder indicates a state of suspension, of physically, conceivably, and experientially being bound by a border space, in a certain sense, incarcerated in a very large prison of the spaces to which a subject is legally limited. Here, s/he must patiently wait his/her turn, go gray, and work extremely hard to survive, just to get through to the spaces of opportunity. This is a strong tendency of condition of many who experience the border. I start with a general discussion of the Mexico-US border, followed by a review of the history of art in the region, and finally, delve deeper to study and analyze the contribution of one particularly noteworthy artist, Marcos Ramírez, commonly known as ERRE. The theoretical support for this organizational logic, which is further explained in the methodology section, comes from connections I’ve drawn between literary analyses on art and the border, which situate ERRE within this context. The text is organized by an introduction section that states a little bit of background on the Tijuana/San Diego border context and the emergence of contemporary art practices as a counter-narrative to institutional or regulated borders\(^3\), the statement of my thesis that narrows the study down to ERRE’s specific contribution in questioning the border and the application of Lefebvrian levels of space\(^4\). It is through this thought process that my study aims to expand on others that place art as a useful eye-opening tool for understanding and deconstructing borders and the conditions and experiences they generate, thus expanding the possibilities of ways to interpret the transborder condition/experience—just as Ramírez has done in the case of the Tijuana/San Diego border. It is as a translator of Iglesias Prieto’s operational dedication to defining the transborder condition experienced in so many different yet collective and cooperative ways, that I re-

\(^3\) This is following global and globally relevant studies of artistic practices as forms of questioning traditional visions. Petra Fachinger’s (1993) discussion of re-writing as an intentional political dialogue with specific texts…a recurrent counter-discursive strategy…defeat attempts to approach a text with a single “appropriate” theory to reveal the strategies and the effects of cultural hybridity.

\(^4\) This logic is the analytical model in Emergencias.
appropriate it here as Transborder indicates a position of being present between two worlds. It is a collective product of distinct and deliberate or purposeful transborder experiences—crossings that dissect the border, that entail high creativity and that are in turn undeniably marked by its physical presence. These distinct narratives intersect with each other in dynamic cultural border Meccas such as Tijuana.

As my interest in the border and artistic production was originally sparked by theory around, from and about borders, identity, space, and power relations, it makes sense to start there and move on to art on the border. The conceptual framework formed by those connections ultimately narrows down to ERRE, the final subject of study. Chapter one is the conceptual and theoretical chapter, which is meant to lay out the setting of ideas in which borders, art, Tijuana/San Diego, identity, and glo-cal experiences in the region are re-examined. Chapter two is the methodology chapter and acts as a blueprint to the questioning strategies to illuminate the power of individual narrative, especially in the Mexico-US border region.

Chapter three provides a contextual web that places ERRE and border questioning within three overarching contexts: the physical and conceptual Tijuana-San Diego border region, contemporary global conceptual art practices, the arts community within the Tijuana-San Diego border region. It is fair to mention that Tijuana produces a lot more public art in a concentrated space than does San Diego. Hence, when I say contemporary art practices on the Tijuana/San Diego border, I’m typically referring to art and artists that originate from Tijuana for a reason many who’ve been drawn to this cultural hub could appreciate. The asymmetrical development of the “sister” cities has organically given rise to a DIY (Do-it-yourself) cultural/artistic practice/survival mechanism, especially marked in Tijuana (Iglesias Prieto, 2006). For instance, some Houses in Tijuana are made of any available-at-the-time, satisfactory materials—sometimes even harmful by-products of the notorious neo globalization. Many Tijuanense artists used these recycled materials as muses. New Realist

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5 DIY, as Claudia Sandoval wrote in her 2005 Master’s Thesis in Regional Development, was a key practice of survival that is apparent in Tijuana’s colectivos’ daily practices and informal meetings.
Jaime Ruiz Otis exercised and exploited his own power of individual experience when he made *Trademarks/Registros de labor*. Ruiz Otis turned trash into art by using NAFTA’s harmful by-products to document the invasion of Mother Earth⁶ and to make statements of beauty and strength in the face of the violence of industrialization—an allusion to the level of resiliency that only Tijuana knows. In metropolises and borderlands all over the globe, it seems a heightened creativity is born of this spirit of enduring and managing real and extreme crisis. The deliberate human agency behind *Do it yourself* practices was central in the artistic explosion that reached a peak in Tijuana somewhere in the mid-nineties—precisely during the start of ERRE’s career. From that point in chapter three, I transition to a contextual overview of ERRE’s artistic trajectory, including more personal references to his life where appropriate and necessary to fully understand his connection to his work and the greater purpose it serves in driving his passion for art as an agent of social change.

Norma Iglesias Prieto (Iglesias Prieto, 2008) tells us that “Tijuana is the muse and also the workshop,” explaining that the creative practice and the collective imagination of the city’s inhabitants, is the catalyst which provides the tools for transcendence of the border’s condition as a limit, by denaturalizing the border and revealing and questioning its numerous inherent asymmetries (p. 56). If this is true, then ERRE’s role, as one of the more well-known installation artists from the region, is a cornerstone in the collective effort to engender an artistic practice that promotes transcendence of the Mexico-US border through individual human transborder experiences. By way of an analytical look at nine of ERRE’s installations in a specific time-space of the Mexico-US border, while considering the chronological trajectory and some general trends in ERRE’s work, this study aims to shed light upon the process of questioning borders through art, and implications that can be drawn from this process. I define key terms through literary review in the Conceptual Framework Chapter.

⁶ I connect the idea of the natural with Mother in agreement with many others, who view the natural environment as a provider of life and opportunity. This is in line with post secular and postborder feminist writers who recognized the power of natural creations to determine boundary lines, and this evolved, uninvasive, and less masculine way of understanding the other.
As I have stated, the primary intent in studying ERRE’s work and its pertinence in the context of borders is to develop a deep understanding of the way in which Marcos Ramírez ERRE’s artistic productions have expressed and questioned the border, and how his works have contributed in redefining the *transborder experience*, the border and its everyday dynamics on three different levels of space according to Henri Lefebvre—spatially/physically, conceptually/historically, and experientially (experience of the border).

With this primary focus in mind, the following specific questions guide the focus of this study. First, in order to bring the research subject Marcos Ramírez ERRE to light, I look for pieces that form a comprehensive understanding of his life trajectory rooted in the negotiation of his roles as a *Tijuanense*, a *transborder* subject, a Mexican, a Californian, a global subject, a lawyer, a carpenter, and finally, an artist and how these roles have evolved and fluctuated in response to everyday realities. Secondly, to achieve a holistic understanding of Ramírez’ artistic trajectory through the analysis of his pieces (objects of research), I look closely at nine that meet three specific criteria: (1) that the piece intervene symbolic and geopolitical borders or urban spaces, (2) that the medium be classified as installation, at least in part, because installation art is designed to change the perception or function of its surrounding environment, (3) that it deal with or be influenced by the Mexico-US border/the *transborder condition* in some fashion. (to be articulated in the Methodology). Thirdly, it’s important to recognize the growing sophistication of Ramírez’ work in line with his movement across and along the border, as a means of facilitating his art production process so as to render some deductions about the relationship/absence of relationship between this upward trend and his position vis-à-vis the Mexico-US border. Within this third specific objective, I plan to make connections between Ramírez’ art-making techniques and his movements in relation to the border and the globe. The fourth sub problem I sought to resolve was how to chronologically and conceptually situate Ramírez within the rich cultural context of post-contemporary art in Tijuana’s art nest and conceptual internalization and appropriation by the San Diego artists of the 1970’s. Fifthly, lastly, and most importantly, I aim to articulate the way in which Ramírez’ public art in Tijuana has intervened the city on three levels (applying Henri Lefebvre’s concept of “production of space”). These levels are as follows: (a) physical spaces, (b) conceptual/perceived spaces, (c) emotive/lived spaces (people’s experiences of Tijuana and the border Region). This is the climactic point of
analysis where all other sub problems are consolidated, re-appropriated and re-thought such that a moment of clarity about this ambiguous and real borderlands becomes possible.

Diverging from some other texts on art in the border region, my treatment of ERRE’s work and its significance in the border is not canonic, but rather one that focuses more on how this work questions traditional or institutional understandings of the Mexico-US border in terms of space and concept and therefore, perhaps has this effect on borders in general. As I expand upon later in Section 2.4, the two thousands operate as a post-post modern literary and artistic era, or one that questions the narrowness of naming and defining literary practices by school of thought. At least in part, this trend of questioning is due the growth in opportunities for exposure to the planet’s diverse societal difference and exposure to the other through mass media and the internet in the current context of globalization. In a similar way, my exposure to the other has contributed to the possibilities in my life. It makes me question everything around me, and therefore, I am constantly making discoveries about my linkages to others. I am operating within a post-post context, from which I develop an individual post-post-narrative of my own. I see a potential dialogue between my PostSaraism and ERRE’s message to post____isms. Although I don’t intend to be deliberately anti-monumental, that is just a natural result of being placed in unnatural circumstance. This could indicate that exploring the subjective condition is important in developing understandings of the global context.

As opposed to attempting to capture a complete collection of contemporary artistic production and the level of impact on non-artistic intellectual and physical realms, I instead look at the work of one artist who has been unarguably pivotal in the evolution of art’s purpose in the borderlands. I look, specifically at ERRE’s work and observe how it moved away from the simple aesthetic and toward a critical role that encompassed pushing borders to open space for real social change. For example, ERRE’s earlier work, though not aimed at looking beautiful, held the viewer’s focus on a fixed aesthetic object. In contrast, later pieces increasingly kept the viewer’s focus constantly mobile and active, counterbalanced with divergence to deconstructed elements, media and moving parts. This purposefully placed emphasis on the experience versus the physical condition of things.

I illustrate this artistic emphasis on the power of conscious experience for questioning borders using a mixed methodology. Analytical categories and application of critical spatial
theory provide a methodological grid by which to compare and contrast nine installations and contextualize them within the real and the imaginary, showing how their reconfiguration of the space naturalizes the *transborder condition* and detonates prescriptions of identity with the bombs of individual experience.
CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 RETHINKING BORDER AND THE NATION-STATE

I begin with a critical look of the concept of border, and theory it has generated or provoked. An initial literary observation is that it is very difficult to encapsulate or associate the idea with a singular trope. The task of contextualizing this conceptualization theoretically is even more difficult, if not impossible, and definitely overwhelming to attempt.

Academics and artists alike have shown interest in reimagining and reinventing borders. Many recognize the importance of inquiring into borders and the “reality” they create or imply. It seems that individuals are drawn to the dimensional sophistication of opportunities generated by borders and evolving understandings, indicating a collective sense of having moved beyond the categories that define these authors intellectually.

Eighteenth-Century British Theatre critic Mita S. Choudhury, has paid close attention to the origins of literary border crossings. She said: “The inextricable link between situatedness/where and identity/who could never be fully understood without an instinctive knowledge of physical and metaphorical, real and imagined borders. Likewise, demographic divides would be incomprehensible in the absence of difference” (Choudhury, 1999, p. 70). Choudhury has mentioned two major tendencies here: borders as physical constructs versus borders as metaphors or symbols. In literature and art, borders have been widely recognized and theorized in metaphorical form as well as in terms of their physical presence. The physical/metaphorical border dichotomy could be analogous to the tensions between Modernism/Postmodernism and Colonialism/Postcolonialism, in that both of these examples present theoretical and literary ruptures between those who naturalize or enforce borders and those who question or denaturalize borders. Still, borders and the amalgam of theories concerning theme are amongst the most misunderstood in social theory in what could be referred to as the interdisciplinary postcolonial literary context. However, if we chose to look at borders through this postcolonial lens, then we agree that we are limiting it to the
definition of Postcolonial, which effectively refers to the body of literary work that breaks free of the colonial paradigms. Edward Said is widely known as the father of Postcolonialism. Postmodern and poststructuralist are two other posts commonly associated with postcolonial, and have even been claimed to carry the same connotation of post. Yet others have called postcolonialism a reinforcement of colonialism just as yet others have criticized border studies for reiterating borders. Although these similarities lead to a theoretical web of discourse about and around difference and the humanist understandings of subjective experience, and question power and institutionalism, there is a substantial element of disagreement among these similar patterns of thought, thereby making the playing field more complex and problematizing it such that canons start to lose their relevance. In other words, postcolonial theory or border studies, transborder or postborder\(^7\), condition or experience, are still mechanisms of literary division, rupture, or dyad.

It is in the interest of breaking secularity, or the separation of the body and the spiritual self, that the next group of authors questioned post theories such as postmodernism and postcolonialism and recognized women who spiritually infiltrated these discourses, breaking a boundary between their analytical and spiritual selves. This dynamic was directly reflected in the work they produced, which now included their subjective transborder experiences legitimate sources from which to draw as the spiritual and analytical were fluidly bound within each individual. These authors were tending to cross literary borders and venture outside of the realm of the academically bound.

Central to these debates are the critiques of postcolonialism such as in *Coloniality at large: Latin America and the postcolonial debate*. Mabel Moraña, Enrique D. Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui (2008) argue, citing Richard King and Walter Mignolo, that it is a particular group of women of colors’ spiritual contribution that postsecularizes\(^8\) theory and creates an opportunity to move beyond the postmodern and postcolonial theory. As they put

\[^7\]This concept is borrowed from Postborder City: Spaces of Bajalta California by Micheal Dear and Gustavo Leclerc.

\[^8\]Writers such as Philip Blond (1998) hold that Postsecularism refers to the idea that there is a spiritually conscious enlightenment upon us which will replace current Western secularism.
it these two posts “share a secular thrust that reflect either a commitment or a complicity with modernity/coloniality. … consistently sustain an imperial logic of power premised on the ideas of the religious and the secular” (p. 382). Furthermore, they know that the task at hand with social sciences is not only to be able to see beyond the state as “the unit of registry,” but to become postsecular in its understanding of the universe, thereby increasing the possibilities of literary outcomes. Moraña et al argue that although it may seem that border studies and other similar concentrations have roots in area studies originating from the Cold War, what remains almost untouched are the intricate counterpoints between European theory and academic work in the United States and Latin America. The European perspective tends more toward Colonialism while the Latin American toward Postcolonialism. Of course, these ruptures existed between the Middle East, Asia and Africa as well, which intersect each other at the power dynamics or levels of international asymmetry of other global regions. While these ruptures could be understood as tendencies or patterns, their presence is nonetheless global. The current Middle Eastern revolutions that are taking place are showing a growing of rejecting the tyrannical power of the religious state. This idea of “transmodernity” as Moraña et al term it, opens space for the development of a literary parallel to transborderism. Fernando Coronil holds in Coloniality at Large, as well as in an article published in the Cambridge Collection that there is no official body of Latin American “postcolonial” literature:

While the rubric “Latin American postcolonial studies” suggests the existence of a regional body of knowledge under that name, in reality it points to a problem: there is no corpus of work on Latin America commonly recognized as “postcolonial.” This problem is magnified by the multiple and often diverging meanings attributed to the signifier “postcolonial,” by the heterogeneity of nations and peoples encompassed by the problematical term “Latin America,” by the thoughtful critiques that have questioned the relevance of postcolonial studies for Latin America, and by the diversity and richness of reflections on Latin America’s colonial and postcolonial history, many of which, like most nations in this region, long predate the field of postcolonial studies as it was developed in the 1980s. (Coronil, 2008, p. 396)

Coronil’s (2008) scrutiny of the disconnect between postcolonial studies, such a widely accepted canon for humanities as an model for better understanding the other, and the whole gamut of cultural phenomenon that accompanies it, leads him to the conclusion that “the diversity and richness of reflections on Latin America's colonial and postcolonial history like most nations in this region, long predate …postcolonial studies as it was developed in
the 1980s” (p. 396). Coronil (2008) asks pertinent fundamental questions about the postcolonial canon, showing that there is a wide gap in understanding in the Latin American context, thereby highlighting an area common to the post in this thesis on Art and the Mexico-US border.

How then to identify and examine a body of work that in reality does not appear to exist? How to define it without arbitrarily inventing or confining it? How to treat it as “postcolonial” without framing it in terms of the existing postcolonial canon and thus inevitably colonizing it? (p. 396)

Through literary battles of wits with canons theory about borders has seemed to have been able to avoid colonization on at least some level by any one overarching school of thought. Perhaps the reason is that we are operating on a different dimension, or plane in the context of borders. I would like to use a completely arbitrary example to show what I mean.

As a university student in the Ethnic Studies Department, I might be interested in a Chinese Studies major, but often this pull is yet stronger if I’m a Chinese American seeking a connection with my heritage. Looking deeper into the, if I may be so bold, universality of this human longing for roots, we find the beginnings of evolving understandings of the self. It is at least in part, my condition that helps guide my logic in choosing a lens through which to view the world. My own post comes into play here as a guiding personal canon that I must follow in order to be in line with the model of the ideal Iranian American, as a good and pure woman/daughter/mother/student/ etc...who unconsciously represents my Diaspora wherever I go, like it or not. Societal rules of conduct dictate these model roles and there are many, that upon breaking I, for example, have severely rocked the cultural boat of my blood-family, resulting in bitter feelings and mistrust. This shows the power of a cultural expectation, or the travel canal that limits individual expression to the narrow confines of culture. When the unit of registry, as some call it becomes the undefined space in between, instead of an ethnic marker, the lens is then a kaleidoscopic one of infinite possibilities for creativity, production, encounter, and survival.

As Anthony Pym (1996) reveals, there is a real fear of crossing or of getting in touch with our inner and outer others. “Identity,” as Giménez said, “…assumes, by definition, the subjective point of view of social actors about their unity and their symbolic borders; about their relative persistence on time and about their placement in the ‘world’, that is, in social
space” (Iglesias Prieto, 1999, p. 9). In an interview about the hybrid and the crossing, he says:

The result is a hybrid, a monster, precisely of the kind that postcolonial studies often finds when self meets other in a frontier region, when there is anxiety about crossing boundaries: …Beware, if you venture beyond, you yourself might become a monstrous hybrid, neither here nor there, lost in heresy… Thus does the self-produce the imaginary mix so as to affirm its purity, expressing anxiety about the attraction of the other and the quite real possibility of becoming something in-between. (Pym, 1993)

The fear of becoming the other, “nor here nor there, lost in heresy…” or “something in between,” are so universally recognized in literature and art, politics and society. In Pym’s (1993) *Alternatives to Borders in Translation Theory*, we see special attention given to borders as a factor for the contemporary problematic as he defends the notion that borders are the center of controversial “intercultural relationships,” explaining that this controversy typically stems from imperialistic attitudes of entitlement to land, resources, etc…Here, borders become spaces of interaction and therefore necessarily, impose definitions and categories of social identity.

The most problematic intercultural relationships at this end of the twentieth century are associated with disputes over borders. They often ensue from notions of cultural sovereignty, from beliefs that a culture has some kind of unalienable right to some kind of specificity. Such beliefs become most problematic when expressed as claims to a particular territory, to a cultural homeland, spreading across the space of one particular color on a map of world cultures. (Pym, 1996, p. 451)

Borders here are represented as spaces in which simple logic such as here and there, us and them, lose their functionality. Borders, instead, could be understood as spaces and conditions in which basic rules are broken by interaction and exchange. This is precisely the heart of the *transborder*: fusion, a state of existing in between, and the birth of *third spaces*. Pym continues to elaborate on this notion of asymmetrical entitlement to cultural specificity in border spaces full of power structures and identities. Complexity is more heightened in these in-between spaces than in within nation-states, as is reflected in the complex border spaces and identities. It could be that this questioning is a way of getting to know or define oneself as the border could be doing in its rebirth or coming of age. Pym is alarmed to find how quickly we arrive at the solution, which has traditionally been the homogenization of culture, language and sovereignty:
A few steps then reach notions of all-purpose cultures, all-purpose languages, and all-purpose sovereign states to make sure everything stays in place, as if there were no alternative solutions to problematic intercultural relations. But are there any alternatives? Where might they be found? (Pym, 1996, p. 451)

The answer to Pym’s question could be the key that unlocked doors of real mental emancipation: “alternative solutions to problematic intercultural relations.” These solutions come from the people, strategies for survival and expression that stem from the love for life and not from the state as orders.

The section of Nancy A. Naples’ (2010) study Borderlands Studies and Border Theory: Linking Activism and Scholarship for Social Justice that outlines borderlands theory history entitled: Borderlands, Border Theory, and Disciplinary Border Crossers cites Juarez/El Paso native Pablo Vila who gives collective credit for shaping the field of borderlands studies to four theorists. The article states:

The goal of early borderlands studies was to understand the complex processes that shaped politics, economics, and culture along the U.S.-Mexico border. Scholars working on immigration patterns, social control, labour practices, and cultural tensions along the Border shared a commitment to empirical investigations and practical problem-solving goals for their research despite diverse conceptual and methodological disciplinary backgrounds. Vila argues that the field of borderlands studies is now strongly shaped by the theoretical insights found in four key texts by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), Renato Rosaldo (1989), D. Emily Hicks (1991) and Hector Calderon and José David Saldívar (1991). Most contemporary scholars writing about borders continue to examine the geographic borders between nation-states and the Borders between legality and illegality that are set through immigration law (see, for example, Calavita 1992; Bosniak 2006). The United States–Mexico border is the subject of ongoing surveillance, militarization, and the politics of fear as expressed in various legislative and cultural constructions that have increased since 9/11 (see, for example, Preston 2007). As Wright demonstrates, despite these measures, citizens of the U.S. and Mexico have developed important collaborative social justice projects to address the increase of violence and needs of laborers and their families on both sides of the Border (see also Mendez 2002). (Naples, 2010)

Emily Hicks (1991), as mentioned above held that viewing the border in a multidimensional or holographic way. “North American critics of Latin American literature must realize that to continue to stress the “magical” or even certain postmodernist aspects of Latin American literature is to deny the larger, broader understanding of reality that informs these texts” (Hicks, 1991, p. xxvii).
Though Emily Hicks’ holographic border model is eye opening and cathartic, Anzaldúa’s poetic spirituality unveils and crosses an infinity of inner and metaphoric borders, and Rosaldo, Calderon, and Saldivar contribute groundbreaking ideas of cultural mediation of human conduct and more, it is short-sighted as even as surely these authors would agree, to neglect the meaningful global contributions of others into this line of enquiry. At times, the institutional barriers such as stringent immigration controls or language, international copyright barriers, to name a pair, hide, or make invisible work of scholars who have dedicated their lives to studying borders, and Tijuana/San Diego’s in specific.

Other political theorists define borders by different parameters the definition of the concept border; Perhaps it is fair to conclude that territorial and legal constitute the physical level of border spaces are represented in these theories. This can be viewed as a point of departure or a foundation for leaping into the conceptual and experiential levels of space. The Johns Hopkins University Press and Muse SAIS Review printed Harvey Starr’s *International Borders: What They Are, What They Mean, and Why We Should Care*. In it, he expressed the following description of physical borders:

> Borders matter. Even in today's post-Cold War world of growing democracy, interdependence, and globalization, borders still serve a wide variety of functions across the areas of security, economics, politics, and social interactions. Despite contemporary challenges to sovereignty, borders still delineate areas of legal competence. Borders encompass the territoriality necessary to the concept of the "state." They provide a key element in the structure of the global system—mapping the number and arrangement of the territorial units upon which all humans live. Thus, borders are central to a spatial approach to international politics, by setting out the location and arrangement of states, and their distances from one another. Borders both facilitate and constrain human interaction in conflict and trade, in war and in peace. (Starr, 2006, p.1)

In short, the state creates borders and the state is central to the enforcement of borders. States facilitate and constrain human movement and interaction, as Starr articulates. The assertion that “…borders are central to a spatial approach to international politics, by setting out the location and arrangement of states, and their distances from one another,” (Starr, 2006, p.1) says that exclusion and control of movement of goods and people, being the first to lay claim to something, is okay and in fact, encouraged. This view of borders—borders as a mechanism—manipulates them in a very strategic and political way, one that is cold, or perhaps comfortably ignorant to the social realities that borders incur. Although borders
clearly act as international boundaries, is not feasible to have a complete understanding of borders without digging deeper into the ruptures between the distinct forms of assuming, experiencing and questioning them in the social sphere.

The intense asymmetry when two nations—two value sets and two cultures collide is visible in many developed-underdeveloped relationships of the planet, such as Mexico-US. It is in my view the people that make such relationships, albeit, on an atomic scale in the context of the globe or the universe. Still, the interpersonal connections that run over, through and under the divides, are collectively, what makes a greater relationship, or reality, of Mexico-US. It is with this idea in mind that I would now like to move to a deeper level of questioning the border from the perspective of subjective position. In the past, the scholarly validity of analytical methods that reveal the reflexive self, or the writer becoming a subject of analysis, has come under question. The critique is that using subjectivity as an analytical lens or category compromises objectiveness and therefore, weakens the validity of the hypotheses and conclusions in such introspective work. Though using identity as a lens may seem unstable and problematic as uncountable public identity crises and mental illness diagnoses have emerged in recent times, it is in fact these crises that make the subjective experience especially important in the case of understanding the reality of presently highly conflictive border regions. In agreement with authors who have long noted the importance of recuperating voices and narratives from the silence and other scholars who have a strong human rights interest as contextual compass, I embark on this journey, delving deeply into physical and conceptual possibilities that arise from the marriage between theory and artistic practice.

Appadurai’s concept of ethnoscapes, as well as Soja’s interpretation of Lefebvre’s concept of the thirdspace, trialectics, or “thirling-as-othering” all point to the importance of understanding that our identities are not necessarily bound by our physical geopolitical borders. Physical space is only one dimension from which identity is constructed. Guy Debord (2011), Henri Lefebvre’s colleague and predecessor coined the term Psychogeography in 1955 as the "the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals."
Soja applies this knowledge to his analysis of urban laboratories such as Los Angeles, Tokyo, and Tijuana, and analyzes the intricacies of human intention in settling into the urban spaces for distinct reasons. Arjun Appadurai (1996) uses the term *ethnoscape* in *Modernity at Large* in the section *Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology* and revisits it in *The Production of Locality* section. He questions the notion that collective identities “necessarily imply that cultures need to be seen as spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or ethnically homogeneous forms” (Appadurai, 1996, 183). Theories of identity contemplate ruptures, tensions, contradictions, and are not always limited by space. They are non-homogeneous as in the phenomenon of the cultural Diaspora. Georg Schöllhammer’s 1999 article, *Art in the Era of Globalization* paid special attention to Appadurai’s conceptualization, especially in terms of identity:

Sites which are "charged‘ in terms of identity, are less and less in line with actual lived in spaces. That which is commonly associated with the concept of the "local", previously expressed by the term "homeland", increasingly contains a virtual character. For Appadurai the relevant frame for examination consists of imagined worlds which are created in a creative process. These sites are not to be understood as replicas or imitations of a site which actually exists yet is nonetheless distant and abandoned by immigrants. It is the experience of de-territorialization itself which must help significantly in shaping this new creation. (Schöllhammer, 1999)

This concept could be interpreted in many different ways. What I understand from the questioning of assumed conditions such as “spatially bounded historically unselfconscious, or ethnically homogeneous,” is that human beings cross borders on many different planes. Like a seed of human construction that is planted, a category, such as a geopolitical border or an identity marker grows in many different directions. It roots dig deep into the soil that grounds it, and its branches grow high into the air that lifts it. It is in a constant state of multilateral growth and flux. Appadurai (1996) is questioning the need for such notion that culture is bound by space, condition, and ethnicity. Patterns of movement across the Mexico-US border in particular have shown to prove that indeed these categories, though they affect the crossing experience, aren’t stopping the movement.

Having looked at these postcolonial and postmodern standpoints, and shifting to a specific critical look highlights the difference in treatments of the border and the givens that they imply. Benedict Anderson (1983), who supporting himself with theory from the likes of Ernest Renan, finds the following: “In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose Anderson’s
definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both
inherently limited and sovereign” (p. 5). Anderson explains that nation-states are *imagined*
because no one claims to know everyone in his or her nationality; imagined as *limited*,
because every nation has finite boundaries; and imagined as *sovereign* because the concept of
nation state emerged when “Enlightenment and revolution were destroying the legitimacy of
the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm” (p. 7). Finally, nation-states are
*communities* because they are based on the “deep, horizontal comradeship” of the inhabitants
that makes it possible for them to die in the name of their country. This concept of *imagined
communities* is central to the case of Mexico and the United States, two nation-states with
very unbalanced histories of power and control, resulting in a bloody war and a forced
national boundary that has never been fully acknowledged as valid. Other crisis-stricken
borderlands include, the former Soviet Union, Palestine/Israel and surrounding Arab region,
Iraq/Syria, Iran//Armenia/Iraq/Turkey/Afghanistan, India/Pakistan, United Kingdom/E.U.,
Costa Rica/Nicaragua.

This line of Andersonian thought has been widely referenced on an interdisciplinary
level. Last year, the Middle East Institute’s Lawrence Pintak, who explores the central role of
the media in the “formation of national identity,” wrote an article for the Middle East Journal
about the reawakening of region Arab consciousness through a revolution of media
representation of the Truth. *Border Guards of the “Imagined” Watan: Arab Journalists and
the New Arab Consciousness* as Pintak (2009) will argue, surveys and opinion polls have
indicated that “Arab journalists stand on the borderlands of Arab identity, shaping an
emerging “imagined” *watan* [nation] that, in some ways, transcends the traditional lines in
the sand that define the nation-state” (p. 1). Following this general discussion of borders and
border studies in the context of postcolonial studies, I explain this further in the context of
the Tijuana/San Diego borderlands, but first, it is important to lay out some historical factors
and the impact on forming ideas of borders. Globalization and transnationalism are concepts
that almost always come hand in hand with borders and the nation-state, but they seem to
have an overarching impact on exponentializing the number of possibilities for movement
and collaboration.
Guidry, Kennedy, and Zald (2001) wrote *Globalizations and Social Movements: Culture, Power, and the Transnational Public Sphere*, in which they took on the task of defining globalization which is in their words:

…what a number of people perceive as a fundamental change in the conditions of human life. Just what has changed and how it has changes, however, are matters of great contention. Nonetheless, current writing on globalization focuses on some specific trends that appear to have pushed the sources and implication of social action beyond state borders. Recent transformation in the transportation and communications technologies) have altered our sense of distance, radically compressing time and space) (Harvey 1989; Giddens 1990, 1994). Territorial states have apparently lost some of their capacities to establish order or mediate change within their borders (Sassen 1996). The number and power of intergovernmental institutions and multinational corporations have grown remarkably (Smith et al. 1997; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse-Kappen 1995). The communications media are increasingly global in both their reference and their reach, and the media also help provide resources in the bulding of transnational communities of immigrants or like-minded activists (Appadurai 1996). Social movements ride the waves of these global processes and formations; in turn, they begin to define new ways of understanding how the world is being transformed. From the vantage point of social movements, globalization offers contradictory possibilities. On the one hand, to the extent that globalization appears to reduce the ability of states to act within their own territories, social movements are dislocated from their usual position of petitioning states to redress grievances. The supposed weakness of states vis-à-vis globalization means that social movements must direct resources toward international linkages and partnerships that can diminish movement autonomy in the home country. On the other hand, globalization has provided social movements with new, possibly significant opportunities and resources for influencing both state and nonstate actors (p. 1).

Guidry et al. (2001) has pointed out that “social movements are dislocated from their usual position of petitioning states to redress grievances” (p. 1). Therefore, they argue, these movements must explore the possibilities of the spaces in between that are being opened wide by globalization. This strategy can “diminish movement autonomy in the home country” (Guidry et al., 2001, p. 1) However, this argument’s possible pitfall is that in many cases, so much of the border space has already been re-appropriated and exploited by the global political economy. Nevertheless, “International linkages and partnerships,” as Guidry et al. (2001) call them, are a critical piece of the puzzle in understanding the disconnects between borderlands and nations.

What exactly is meant by the idea that globalization provides social movements with new “opportunities and resources for influencing both state and nonstate actors?” (Guidry et
al., 2001, p. 1) It is my understanding that the neoglobal\textsuperscript{9} Mexico-US border, although an exciting opportunity for encounter, is also responsible for immeasurable pain, suffering, povertization, and confusion for many. The result is a new web of social movements that, out of necessity for survival against the beast of globalization, is emerging with urgency. We could say that otherness is what connects the social movements under a common understanding. It is these factors of otherness that we have taken into consideration in looking at our own individual experiences that take roots in our distant, parallel, and intersecting human conditions. Though in the past, some have made it their mission to unveil, discover, and deconstruct core values of identitarianism or cultural belonging, others would say that this line of thought oversimplifies identity. Contemporary theories of social and individual identities hold that we must see the complexity of identity so as not to reduce it. Identity is understood as a product of relational processes versus an essence or state of being.

Albeit people who have considered themselves outcasts or others, are far too numerous to adequately represent or illustrate under time and content limitations, I would like to at least acknowledge the critical role of women of colors’ contribution to better understanding the others that borders segregate across the globe.

Here is a possible connection between my above challenge to Guidry et al.’s (2001) representation of globalization and Moraña et al. (2008), in which King and Mignolo, who accredit the spiritual contribution of a particular group of women of color with postsecularizing theory and creating an opportunity to move beyond canons such as the postmodern and postcolonial. Postmodern is a movement whose massive scope includes literature, the visual arts, and other areas and is indicated as a response to Modernism. Aleid Fokkema (1999) in Franssen and Hoonselaars resonates here; He wrote that defining postmodernism seemed impossible at first, because it was “all about fragmentation, anti-representation, and the breakdown of the narrative” (p. 39). Fokkema (1999) continues to clarify that “…what occurs in postmodernism is not the abolishment of the author but a relocation and reconsideration of his (its) function” (p. 39) Postcolonial, as before mentioned,

\textsuperscript{9} Neoglobal as the new high-velocity, hyper-expanded and technological state of globalism
is the collective body of literary work that rejects the colonial model in all its aspects, including the neo-colonial attempts to keep the status quo of power, hierarchy, and division in place even in literature, art, and music. Writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Chela Sandoval, Cherrie Moraga, Emma Pérez, and others used their own subjectivities, which they objectified by viewing the microcircuits of their conditions through analytical lenses. In their words, their methodology of the oppressed” was to use their backs as bridges to write themselves into history in a “neocolonial” world. In a similar vein, Aruna Gnanadason, formerly on the staff of the World Council of Churches, Geneva had this to say in the Gender Across Borders Journal to the question: What Does Global Feminism Mean to YOU?

We need to constantly be in dialogue with each other as women and men. Our religious traditions have been at the heart of forms of untold discrimination and exclusion, such as the fear of women’s sexuality, the abhorrent caste system in India, or racism, or cultural superiority and politically and the militaristically motivated attitudes of imperialism. But, at the same time such a critical dialogical journey will provide us the creative space to discover new forms of community, or shared power and of violence free forms of partnership among women and between women and men (Gnanadason, 2010).

Gnanadason (2010) here tells yet another alternative narrative of the border. Her testament to the power of the potential consciousness that can rise out of crisis and fill the creative space,’ as she terms it, with new forms of community or shard power” not based on the premise of war, but on peace and practical problem solving.

2.2 Conceptualizing and Re-Imagining Mexico-US at Tijuana/San Diego

The ideas from and around borders and the rethinking of the border dynamic, have had a particularly astonishing relevance in the case of México-US. In light of recent violence in the border region (largely due to the drug war and weapons from the north) as well as the historical colonial trade relationship between Mexico and the US, Tijuana-San Ysidro has

10 control by a powerful country of its former colonies (or other less developed countries) by economic pressures (Neocolonialism, n.d.).

11 Reference to feminist Chicana writer Cherrie Moraga’s book, This Bridge Called my Back
been widely recognized as the most well-known and crossed border in the world by many modern theorists.\textsuperscript{12} Although many structural and economic changes with neo-globalization have taken place in order to allegedly “improve” this border region, as I explain in the context and antecedents chapter, the individual narratives of local actors is largely overlooked, along with opportunities to re-think and re-imagine.

For example, George Yúdice (2001) brings to our attention, the movement of social and cultural capital. L.J. Hanifan noted that the accumulation of social capital in a given community “may bear a social potentiality sufficient to the substantial improvement of living conditions in the whole community.” (Bacon, 2009, p. 6). Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu coined the term cultural capital, which refers to non-monetary assets such as education and knowledge that may promote social mobility (Brown, 1970). Discourses like these bring the idea of “looking at the glass half-full” out of the abstract and into the operative. In a time-space as raw and intense as the Mexico-US borderlands, alternative perspective, or concept of “reality” is much more influential in re-imagining that reality when the alternative rises above a trite abstraction of positive thinking. Some, then, argue that we need to look at the border in an alternative, more uninterrupted and harmonious way, a way that captures its true meaning within a rich web of real contexts perhaps even reinvent border, in agreement with scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Rudolfo Chavez. In other words, in order to portray the whole story of a borderlands, or look critically at relations between two nation-states across a highly urbanized border zone, we need to observe it comprehensively, rather than trying to dissect and reconstitute its parts unnaturally and mathematically, insisting on “resolving” its numerous contradictions.

Other studies and analyses of the Mexico-US border and its dynamics have recorded narratives of an open wound (Anzaldúa, 1987), an imagined (Appadurai, 1996) or third space (Soja, 1996), an invisible line, a breaking point, a fusion/hybrid space (Garcia Canclini, 1997), a fission or culture clash, etc. This plethora of different ways of looking at the border

\textsuperscript{12} For example, Iglesias-Prieto (2008, p. 40) and Garcia Canclini (1997)
and its dynamics speaks to the complexity and heterogeneity of the different ways of experiencing it.

Gloria Anzaldúa, the famous Texan/Chicana/Queer… writer rejected being confined by boundaries even in her very writing style that with no warning, jumped from English to Spanish, poetry to prose to history, personal anecdotes and analyses of excerpts from other authors, making her work a culturally rich and inclusive border narrative. Pushing the borders of gender, race, and the idea de facto of borders in her famous book *Borderlands/La Frontera*, she wrote:

> The U.S. Mexican border es una herida abierta 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. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 25)

This expression of the border as a “wound [that] hemorrhages” evokes painful feelings of being caught in between dualistic paradigms, or inner battles between the dark and the light, the moon and the sun, the yang and the yin, the feminine and the masculine, etc… a border is an attempt, as she puts it “to distinguish us from them.” A wound that doesn’t clot is dangerous because it will bleed out. For Anzaldúa (1987), the border is a painful reminder of exclusion and rejection based on skin color, level of modern urban development, and other socioeconomic factors, “una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds.” Upon deciding what the border signifies to her, Anzaldúa (1987) places herself within this borderlands, evoking the ethos, or the emotional aspect of the borderlands at the same time: “a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary.” For example, the coastal border fence gets knocked down by the ocean repeatedly, and the Rio Grande River floods over borders into the cities. The state’s state-of-the-art tracking contraptions employing highly advanced technologies are tripped up cheaply by foxes and coyotes running around in the desert. It is in these ways that *la Madre Tierra* confronts borders fearlessly and without hesitation. Naturally, she doesn’t recognize national borders anymore than does a wild dog in the desert.

Mother Earth observer Anzaldúa (1987), who approaches the México-US border from a very personal perspective, has clearly asserted that it is her fluid experiences of life that
make her who she is. Being in a constant state of flux, she recognizes borders, but focuses on transgressing them. This is all very apparent in her theory, prose and poetry that swallow the border whole and spit it out in a deconstructed way that rejects the given, and charges it with painfully ripping her apart from herself. In Anzaldúa’s (1987) analysis, the concept of fluid identity is a fundamental tenet to understanding and transgressing in the metaphorical limitations of colonial paradigms. Her queerness and femininity are results of the innervations of different parts of her identity-body. Art Historian Jo-Ann Berelowitz (1998) had a similar account on identity which placed emphasis on the ineluctable recognition” as she calls it, “that identity is not fixed but, rather, subject to constant negotiation and renegotiation…” She wrote in her article on Las Comadres, a transnational group of women who joined forces to reconceptualize issues around gender, sexuality, art and the borderlands, in the Gender journal:

I heard many stories like this, stories that spoke of frustrated longing for unity and closeness, followed by the ineluctable recognition that identity is not fixed but, rather, subject to constant negotiation and renegotiation within changing sets of historically diverse experiences. (Berelowitz, 1998)

The constant negotiation and renegotiation that these authors raise alludes to the balancing act engendered by inner metaphorical borders like cultural tightropes that so many walk subconsciously. Las Comadres acknowledged their differences and viewed them as equally important to their collective goal of raising consciousness through art practices.

Through a series hypothetical examples of possible border narratives, it becomes apparent that there are huge gaps between the how’s and why’s, and who’s of the Mexico-US crossing. Narrative 1: If one is a sex worker from a traditional rural setting and new to Tijuana’s Red Light District, he may experience the border’s dynamics as a sick dirty place where you have few work opportunities, making selling sex as a woman a “better option” than you ever imagined. Narrative 2: This would particularly be connected with many gay Mexicanos who have to stay in the closet, because they are culturally pariah’ed by the majority rule in the southern and northern borderlands. This leads to a cultural backlash or
the formation of countercultures\textsuperscript{13} of performing ones skeletons out of the closet, so to speak, and taking advantage of, while at the same time at the mercy of—the state. One extreme example is Tijuana’s cases of police brutality against transvestites and transsexuals. Narrative 3: On the other hand an American diplomat, forty-something from Tennessee, may feel pity for Tijuana’s sad state, doing her best to stay out of its way on the street, staying in her pretty mansion in Playas most of the time. Narrative 4: If you’re a migrant trying to get across to work to support your family, and you nearly die of dehydration and heat exhaustion in the crossing, then the border is a cruel reality that you dread, but that you have to face in order to have a “better” life. Each one of these conceivable narratives elicits a distinct effect and evokes conceptualizing the Mexico-US transborder condition in a new way.

It is the interest of carefully considering this difference index that Iglesias Prieto defined and established a scale to measure degrees of transborderism in her 3-volume book Emergencias on visual arts practices in Tijuana: “A higher level of transborderism assumes higher level of interaction, crossing and commitment to “the other side,” which implies greater capacities and cultural richness as well as a greater identitarian complexity” (Iglesias Prieto, 2008, 40). She continues to elaborate upon the differences transborderism sustains vis-à-vis transnationalism, which, she holds, are especially evident in questions of identity. The “velocity” of transborder movement for example, and the concept of dual citizenship across a border as opposed to a farther-removed national territory are amongst some of these distinctions.

Though thinkers such as Anzaldúa, Appadurai, Crosthwaite, Cruz, Dear, Gerber, Herzog, Iglesias Prieto, Monsivais, Valenzuela, Ybarra-Frausto, Yúdice have all shown a deep and critical preoccupation for the border and the notions of identity within the region, what is particularly overarching is the sense of uniqueness of Tijuana/San Diego as the single

\textsuperscript{13} This idea of counterculture is present in Tijuana’s youth, who as Iglesias-Prieto highlights, are in demographic majority, yet who’s interests are allegedly left out of their government’s decisions. Artists’ movements, among other subcultural events such as rock and punk concerts have risen from the recognition of this reality an artistic manifestation of the emotional shock this recognition ignites.
most frequented, most active, most commercialized and globalized border region in the world (Iglesias Prieto, 2008, p. 61; Romero, 2008, p. 89).

The recently developed thought of a postborder puts the very existence of the border into question by arguing that movement across borders is what creates them in the first place. *Postborder City: Cultural Spaces of Bajalta California* is a collaborative text edited by Michael Dear and Gustavo Leclerc (2003), which contextualizes the Mexico-US border within a fluid space and time through an artistic perspective. Taking nothing for granted, the authors collectively address the role of creative practice and art production in the border and *Postborder* context have treated the fluid nature of border identities, or the transborder condition/experience as well, characterizing them as hybridized mutant results of historical and cultural fusions:

The Border, the locus of transnational crossings, is part of the present monumental migrations bridging notions of past and present, home and abroad, global and local, and modernity and postmodernity. In these in-between (or liminal) spaces, elements of different worlds simultaneously coexist and mutate; this process is what we refer to as the postborder condition. It is transforming urban centers on both sides of the Border, creating a blurred macrofrontier—a transcultural borderland—from northern Baja California to Southern California, and beyond. (Dear & Leclerc, 2003, p. xi)

*Postborder City* defines the Border as not only a space of limits, but as an opportunity for encounter, exchange, and innovation. Norma Iglesias Prieto (2003) has referred to border as “…a third country…a mélange of the Unites States and Mexico, yet…unlike either” (p. 183). Similarly, as I will mention later, torolab’s Raul Cardenas has referred to Tijuana as closer to science fiction to reality (Montezemolo, Peralta, & Yepez, 2006, p. 173).

Whichever definition of the border is adopted, a common strand in recorded accounts of the border is the multidimensional condition of being a transborder subject (by Iglesias Prieto’s (2008) definition). As aforementioned, spatial analyses of the Mexico-US border have characterized it as a new space, even at times as a phenomenon that exists solely in the imaginary spaces of our minds, but nonetheless, it is a space that generates new and more complex identity processes. Beyond these spatial understandings of the border, however,
there are ways to experience this border that are marked by the subject’s specific condition. The condition of being a transborder person\textsuperscript{14} as opposed to other distinct conditions, opens the opportunity to live and narrate one’s own unique transborder experience.

For the purposes of this study on art and the transborder condition/experience, I understand border as the geopolitical boundary between the US and Mexico at Tijuana/San Diego, while using the other metaphorical understandings of the border as reference points for analysis where necessary and appropriate. This border has been experienced, transgressed and crossed over in such a rich myriad of different ways over time—of which no two are the same. I hope to explore and expand upon understandings of multidimensionality as a result of my study by looking at the transborder experience from an artist’s standpoint. Politically conscious art born out of Tijuana/San Diego makes it evident that the privilege, power, and politics so starkly concentrated and evident in this region are socially constructed, imperfect, and therefore subject to criticism and questioning by the public (Iglesias Prieto, 2006). In a period where the institutions have taken upon themselves to naturalize such as institutional discourses of the border, the very thought and enforcement of national boundaries and the nation-state, artists take it upon themselves to unnatürlich or deconstruct social and political constructs, thereby naturalizing their own otherness within.

As Tijuana’s importance on a global scale became greater, her artists responded by linking their art practices ever more to ideas about the border and crossing it. Perhaps Julia Chaplin’s 2006 New York Times article entitled “Art on the Edge in Mexico City,” could paint a telling picture of the artistic and cultural trends in a modern Mexican metropolis.

Mexico City's extremes — its wealth and poverty, the tranquillity of its leafy parks and the sunburned chaos of its hectic avenues — are particularly conducive to its current edgy creativity. One can start an evening by dining at a guarded garden restaurant in the wealthy Polanco neighborhood and wind up at 3 a.m. at a seedy transvestite bar in the Centro Histórico. Mexico City's affluent seem willing, possibly as result of the trendiness of contemporary art, to embrace street culture in a way that was probably considered too dangerous, or déclassé, 20 years ago. (Chaplin, 2006)

\textsuperscript{14} I interchangingly use person and subject when referring to the transborder.
Today, Tijuana is arguably the epitome of this classification of edgy creativity inspired by the anarchy of a metropolis’ many paradoxes. In this specific time-space, there are many contributing factors, its geopolitical placing being a central one.

Though the dynamic of conceptual art may not have exploded in Mexico up until this point, art across the globe was certainly headed in that direction. As in Mexico, where as the article points out that the D.F. elite were prepared, possibly as a result of the trendiness of contemporary art, to embrace street culture in a way that was probably considered too dangerous, or déclassé, 20 years ago, this dynamic could be observed in Tijuana today and could be a cultural parallel of an encounter between Anglo ‘investors’ that made a specific cultural practice trendy and native ‘facilitators’ of excitement and belligerence, during the prohibition in the United States, for example. The difference being, of course, that contemporary art and nightclubs cater to two very different groups of tourists. Although Mexico City was beginning to experience its own artistic renaissance, conceptual art had its philosophical roots in Europe in large part.

### 2.3 The Universe of Conceptual Artistic Practices and Contemporary Society

There was a steady uprising of conceptual art as a societal act, or another opportunity for alternate forms of collectivity as opposed to organization. As early as 1933, Hungarian artist Laszlo Moholy-Nagt did Sil I, an abstract painting that appears to manipulate space on different complex dimensions. In Germany, interestingly, the same year that Debord developed his concept of psychogeography the Documenta is launched. This statement is found when Documenta is googled:

> The documenta is regarded as the most important exhibition of contemporary art, drawing attention from all over the world. It was initiated in 1955 by the artist and art educator, Arnold Bode, in Kassel. After the period of Nazi dictatorship, it was intended to reconcile German public life with international modernity and also confront it with its own failed Enlightenment. (Kulturportal Hessen, 2007)

Interestingly enough, art was used as a tool for intellectual reconciliation of Germans and the rest of the “modern world.” Arnold Bode started Documenta after the eruption of a brutal world war and the Nazi dictatorship with this specific agenda in mind.

In Italy, Fontana the Father of Spazialismo 1947 (reflective exploration of integrating spatial relationships with the development of two-dimensional media (Hodge & Anson,
that was expressed as Dadaist minimalism to the point of presenting a negative presence. His “Cuts,” or “Tagli” were a simple yet profound explorations of negative spaces that started in 1958.

Each cut was made with a single gesture using a sharp blade, and the canvases were then backed with strong black gauze giving the appearance of a void behind. In 1968 Fontana told an interviewer that, 'my discovery was the hole and that's it. I am happy to go to the grave after such a discovery' (Howarth, 1960; p. 12)

Keeping in mind that this body of work was born of the Modern Art context, one of the pieces, “Spatial Concept Waiting,” could possibly bear a resemblance to Lefebvre’s spatial conceptual and emotive planes of understanding and deconstructing the space around us—the emotive in this case being the slash through a canvas. The artistic version puts theory into motion by the act of producing a cut into canvas and therefore opening a new dimension of perception or experience with the negative space. Following are a few examples of world artists who questioned borders from 1970 to the mid 1990s. Specifically, themes such as identity (gender, ethnicity), cultural and ethical border crossing, rejections of classical traditions, the body as a physical social constraint and the construction of life as we know it, were central to these pieces.

Chillida’s 1963 Modulation of Space and Naum Gabo Linear Construction No. 2 (1970-71) are two other European examples of the spatial preoccupation. Naum Gabo said: “We were convinced that what we were doing represented a new reality…the mechanics of forms existing in space and the tensions set by sustaining this equilibrium are epitomized by Linear Construction No. 2” (as cited in Hodge & Anson, 1996, p. 259). Bruce Nauman’s Good Boy, Bad Boy in 1985 consisted of two videotapes of two different people with different identity markers reading the exact same script simultaneously but unsynchronized. “The force of each statement depends upon the gender, tone of voice, and other factors about the actor” (as cited in Hodge & Anson, 1996, p. 259). In 1992, Mona Hatoum from Beirut, who was forced out by war in 1975, practiced art in the UK “that discussed the physical cultural and ethical boundaries which she has challenged or crossed”…often using herself as a site of metaphor or allegory for social constraints” (as cited in Hodge & Anson, 1996, p. 259). Anish Kapoor made Dragon in 1992, “celebrating the differences and similarities between the Indian and European parts of his identity (mixed)”… Mario Merz’s Do We Turn Around Inside Houses and other types of “arte povera” such referenced the principles of
Duchamp and Beuys, gesturing toward changing the status of art from marketable commodity to a means of expression that focused on society and its survival. …the rejection of classical traditions freed Merz to symbolize fundamental and universal concerns via a diversity of form and content…a reconsideration of how we construct our lives” (as cited in Hodge & Anson, 1996, p. 259). This spatial preoccupation of art contributed greatly to connecting the dots between performance and perceptions of life.

If you understand politics as a set of rules, then the politics of art are that there are no politics. No rules. Everything is fair game. Some may call that anarchy and others, logical adaptability. It is of no consequence what you call it, for these classifications do not pose a problem, but rather generate philosophical challenges that art readily and consistently undertakes with inspired dedication. Classifications and paradigms are the empty wooden boxes that keep the artistic fire burning so violently. Traditionally, the condition of artist implied a particular neutrality from which to make modernist backdrops and decorate walls. The various canonic artistic eras or trends such as the medieval, romantic, realist, modern, impressionist, abstract, baroque, pop, and conceptual have begun to shy in comparison to the globally significant potential that consciously chosen artistic practices that break free of canons have shown for reveling and challenging rhetoric that leads to classism, elitism, and intellectual apartheid. Though this is not an art history paper, I cannot talk about the power of artistic practices without recognizing the noteworthy contributions of pioneer artists with a higher direction than art for art’s sake. The artists mentioned above and other, more well-known artists who challenged the canonic values of their “place” in the art world, such as Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, Pablo Picasso, and Vincent Van Gogh, to name a few, saw art as a sacred means to an end of re-presenting history while it was physically and conceptually being constructed and presented to people in a package. More contemporarily, art has become increasingly subjectified and this concept has been especially marked in San Diego and Tijuana. One might call the two thousands the “post-post modern” era, one of a new enlightenment in literature and art in general, largely due to the accelerated level of global exposure to difference and the other through mass media and the internet in the current context of globalization. In 2007, Philosopher Stephen Hicks published an article about Post-Post Modern Art entitled: *A Radical Perspective Aesthetic Commentary: Post-Post modern*
Art. In it he stated that art by nature, was a conscious act to express something significant, worthy of expending time and effort to express.

Art by its nature is about the significant. To the extent that art is an expression of the artist's being, it expresses what the artist thinks and feels to be significant. To the extent that art is an act of communication, it is a statement to an audience of what the artist thinks and feels to be important. When an artist decides to devote a week, a month, or a year or more of his life to creating This rather than That - he is saying that This is worth his time and effort. When the artist presents the results of his efforts to an audience, he is telling them that his creation is worthy of the time and effort of their contemplation. We do not waste our time on the insignificant or ask others to waste theirs - unless we wish to express the significant belief that nothing is significant. (Hicks, 2007)

As Hicks has so gracefully stated here, conscious artistic practices today have demonstrated the ability to illuminate, even in the midst of cunningly manipulative political systems and intense social unrest. In critically-charged and conscious art\textsuperscript{15}, nothing is prohibited and nothing is given. Nothing is taken without questioning—from the most basic concepts, to the deepest philosophical understandings, e.g., the meaning of life. Artists seek to understand the complex reality, rejecting implied absolute truths. In other words, the fact that something has been recorded as the official “story” does not make it everyone’s reality, or somehow immune to questioning. Frida Kahlo (1953) said once, “They thought that I was a surrealist, but I wasn’t. I never painted my dreams; I only painted my own reality.” “Painting one’s own reality,” as Frida put it, is a conceptual mechanism which artist use to reveal and record their interpretations of the world around them in a moment in time. Frida and others would likely agree that the very condition of artist opens the door for experiences that entail imagining something too good to be true, and bringing that to life in a finished product that is then displayed for \textit{todo el mundo} to see.

Allowing public access to the process of making art is a key characteristic of conceptual art, because understanding the thought process and intentions of the artist during the making of art sheds light on her vision of everything around her. In the art world, revealing the artistic process is increasingly of greater significance and value than having a

\textsuperscript{15} Some may call this \textit{true} or \textit{real} art. As Stephen Hicks says, “art by its nature.” (2007)
polished finished product to show. This level of transparency exposes the artist, his work and any message inherent in that work, thereby making art a platform from which to speak, and raise consciousness. As Emily Hicks (1998) put it, “The notion of art as cultural intervention—or what Mexican muralist Arnold Belkin, in his attempt to define Mexican interdisciplinary artist Felipe Ehrenberg, calls "the artist as citizen"—stretches the definition of art beyond even the flexible boundaries of postmodernism.”

I remember lectures David Antin, who some would argue is one of the founders of San Diegan conceptual art and incidentally, postmodernism as we know it (see context and antecedents), gave at UCSD in early 2000s. They alluded to a “bohemian dandy” who performed his life through a series of artistic practices. Antin would show videos in which “serious” undergraduate art students did not see the point. In fact I distinctly remember one lecture when Antin showed a documentary about Robert Flanagan, supersadomasochist, in which most of the class got up and walked out, offended by its genuine brutality. Flanagan had cystic fibrosis, and most doctors didn’t think he’d make it out of childhood alive. But somehow addicting himself to the feeling of pain ironically gave enough energy to survive. The point of this ended up being quite enlightening to me who, of course with a certain fascination in the sickly shocking, sat through the whole lecture and loved every moment of it. I had to cross many internal borders in order to get to Flanagan’s perspective, and therefore I experienced its multidimensionality in space for myself.

2.4 CONCEPTS DRIVING TIJUANA’S VISUAL ARTS ENGINE AND MARCOS RAMÍREZ ERRE

Art is deeply interwoven with Tijuana’s cultural make-up and political landscape in a complex yet subtle manner. The number of art colectivos and centrality of artistic practice to the society of the city in themselves are markers of this relationship. Artistic practice has literally become the methodology to achieving a new standard of life in the city. Projects such as bulbo’s Tijuaneados Anonimos and Tienda de Ropa, where citizens get to come together and reorganize their city and society. inSITE’s 1992 version of its website talks about its collective collaboration’s aim to be a diverse and rich exchange of viewpoints and individualities of the Mexico-US binational arts community. inSITE, ERRE and others during this particular time-space has asked questions about the border and the transborder
condition very politically, yet subtly. Tijuana took center stage in this debate, as evident in a conversation between Norma and Marcos I for which I was present in November 2006.

… artists who once underappreciated Tijuana and now it’s like, ‘We should go to Tijuana, ‘because it inspires, doesn't it? Something happens and it inspires. ERRE: There is lot of energy, so much creative energy... it’s a Hodge-podge, son of a bitch, human mass of people…of everything. Tijuana is the chingado autistic son of Mexico and United States that no cabron wants to know. Neither of them. But to us, as a single mother Mexico raised the boy. But the Dad is gringo. I don’t mean to say that we are pendejos, we are among the most intelligent. The city has amazing potential, but maybe it’s not capable of developing that potential... appropriately. (Ramírez ERRE, 2006)

If Tijuana is the autistic son of Mexico and United States that no cabron wants to know, then ERRE has adopted this orphan border and made it his own. Proper development of the potential of a young border depends on its upbringing, and an art has the perfect imagination to drive that potential appropriately. This adolescent border has all the possibility in the world and a beautiful imagination but s/he is the other. Being the other is a problem, by her strict and militant father, but s/he is raised by a single mother, Mexico, and many times denied entrance to her father’s front door. This denial of the other within is a common theme for scrutiny in culture and by cultural studies—the other gender, the other ethnicity, the other religion, the other class, etc… Therefore the task of naturalizing the other becomes as immanent as ever. Part of this naturalization, comes from exposing the outcomes of greedy or unmindful practices of construction. ERRE reminded others to maximize their potential and showed us that we are erasing what is important to our cultures by continuing to construct blindly.

In a recent interview on his newest Human Nature Project, Marcos said, in reference to the building of a dam that will eventually lead to the eradication of all historical architecture of Three Parallel Rivers in Shangri-La, “By building, we are destroying; we are dismantling a culture, because it is losing what is important to it.” This reminds me of a Lauryn Hill song Rebel, although it is in the inverse order, as she sings it: “We must destroy in order to rebuild. Wake up you might as well. Are you satisfied? Are you satisfied? Rebel” (Hill, 2002). Perhaps ERRE’s idea of the border wall between the United States and Mexico and Hill’s statement synch in their thoughts of destruction and building, a feeling of dissatisfaction, of cultures that are being dismantled by obsessive building practices. ERRE reveals an actual culture’s demise in the Three Parallel Rivers in China’s sacred Shangri-La
through artistic practices while Lauryn sings about an action plan to our enslaved condition as human beings in general. Although these are two different individuals originally from opposite sides of the border, it could be deduced that there is a correlation in their understandings of the human condition, which puts the bilateral dyad theory of categorizing people based on what side of the border they’re from into question a bit within the very act of artistic production. As many human rights champions have agreed with Lauryn’s message, in one word, what we need to do is rebel. Rebel against the larger powers that be, rage against the machine, against the dark sarcasm in the classroom. Rebel against Babylon, against the man, against la migra, against the illuminati, rebel against the militarization, misery and misrepresentation on our borders. In is in this context of crisis and contradiction that I follow in the footsteps of the others, who see an opportunity for a point of departure for bringing art’s contribution as an agent for social change in Tijuana/San Diego.

A 2002 Newsweek article, “The New Cultural Meccas of the world,” stated:

Tijuana is in the middle of an artistic flowering that has drawn attention from television executives and museum curators from New York to Tokyo. Artists of all stripes are re-examining the hybrid culture of Tijuana that exists between the glitz of San Diego and the factory life Diego Rivera could have painted (As cited in Montezemolo, Peralta, & Yepez, 2006, p. 140).

Artistic expression that has grown out of Tijuana is absolutely reflective of its laboratorial nature. Groups such as Nortec Collective, Bulbo, Yonkeart, and others employ mixing and miss-matching techniques to different pieces of information, weaving them together with a common cohesive intention to say something about their complex environment. In Ollman’s (2006) article on Tijuana as a laboratory, she encapsulates Strange New World in numerical data, which shows the potential impact of art movements in the region:

"Strange New World: Art and Design from Tijuana," recently seen at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego's two venues, is the first to focus attention on Tijuana itself, as urban phenomenon and incubator of culture. With 130 works by 41 artists, architects and designers, the show filled both the museum's main La Jolla facility and its downtown San Diego annex, but still only hinted at the qualities of expansiveness and raw energy that define Tijuana.

This raw energy has been picked up by many. Ollman (2006) cites Iglesias Prieto and deconstructs the philosophy behind Strange New World that each daily activity of Tijuanenses is colored by the hegemony of the United States over Mexico.

“Strange New World" is not about the Border per se, but, as catalogue essayist Norma Iglesias Prieto puts it, "Every one of the everyday practices of [Tijuana's]
Inhabitants bears the mark of the asymmetrical power relation between Mexico and the United States.” This condition manifests itself visibly in an aesthetic of resourcefulness and improvisation, reflected in the vibrant architectural visions of Teddy Cruz, the irreverent extravaganzas of sculptors Einar and Jamex de la Torte, the deconstructed meditations on street vending by Julio Cesar Morales, and the graffiti- and comics-inspired paintings on scrap plywood by Charles Glaubitz. (Ollman, 2006)

In agreement with Norma Iglesias Prieto (2008), I aim to highlight that ERRE is altering the Tijuana/San Diego Border region on Lefebvre’s three levels of space: the perceived, conceived and the lived. (p. 104). These concepts are alternatively understood as the physical, conceptual, and experiential planes of spatial “reality.” I demonstrate, through an analysis of ERRE and his pieces, how he has effectively questioned what we see and what we know about the Mexico-US border through his own subjective lived experience and representations of identity in his work. Further, emphasizing this third level of space through the transborder experience, Marcos, in line with Lefebvre’s questioning of urban spaces, has mitigated the effects of the perceived and conceived Mexico-US border as a constructed urban space and the conditions this space imposes on its subjects.

Putting on the artists’ lens promotes an exploration toward better understanding the transborder condition/experience as a unique and fitting approach to becoming familiar with the inner workings of the dynamic and dramatic Mexico-US border. In this idea, we understand the border as part of a whole—a laboratorial cross-section of the world. Torolab and inSITE, amongst many others have referred to the border as a laboratory. I am taking a look at how artists’ perceptions of the border frame the transborder condition/experience as a specific and unequivocal expression of transnationalism, a concept which has been explored and elaborated by authors such as Bourne, Appadurai, Ybarra Frausto. The important distinction between transborderism and transnationalism is that transborderism is marked by an experience of crossing (Biemann, 1999) which generates an inevitable recognition of a physical national border, a condition/experience not naturally inherent to the transnational experience. Hybrid cultures have traditionally been defined as characterized by their condition of genetic, cultural, and social mixture such as in cases of mulattoes and mestizos. More contemporarily this meaning has evolved and expanded to celebrate hybridity in the sense that it doesn’t erase, but instead is enriched by the cultural mixture (Anzaldúa, 1987). Some would argue that the term hybridity which authors such as Appadurai and Garcia-
Canclini among other predecessors have used to classify the conflicting dualities produced by the dynamics of a geopolitical border, is a problematic concept in that it oversimplifies what is actually a complex weave of cultural intermixture and rich diversity, does not accurately represent the agency that border people practice daily, despite the real and hard obstacles in their way, even in just crossing. Nevertheless, the theoretical corroboration of the inherent harsh nature of this highly industrialized limit between nation-states continues to grow.

Teddy Cruz (2005), Architect, Urban Planner, and Theorist on the Mexico-US border paints a vivid image of the San Ysidro-Tijuana crossing checkpoint, depicting the sad reality of border vendors waking up from the dream of fluid borders:

> Since the actual checkpoint is a few hundred meters into the US territory the real borderline—barely inscribed on the pavement by a series of dots—disappears temporarily, allowing vendors to roam back and forth over the political division…this adventure of the imagination ends when we encounter the US immigration officer whose vigilant mask mirrors the reality we have created, one of isolation, separation and displacement. (p. 85)

Iglesias Prieto (2008) has devoted intensive investigative efforts to demonstrate that visual art practices in Tijuana play a central role in understanding our urban condition in a geopolitical border region: first in the possibility of imagining a different city; second, in redefining the city and its dynamics; and third, in opening real possibilities for change for the city in its entirety, as well as for the subjects that inhabit it. In line with thinking outside of the identity boxes created by borders, in a refusal to partition the pieces of himself, ERRE said, “I don’t think it’s good to forget anything. Instead of feeling half Mexican and half American, I feel double” (United States Artists, 2007).

This account and other conceptualizations of otherness within have come out of contemporary arts in the border region—especially from Tijuana. Many of the artists and theorists mentioned thus far who have experienced Tijuana first-hand have talked about it as a laboratory due to the concentration and clash of many different cultural practices and narratives in one small, yet continuous space. It’s important to clarify here that although these discourses come from an understanding of the border space and relations as fluid and continuous, there is a fundamental recognition of the tension, conflict, and contradiction produced by this spatial continuity. Border artists and theorists such as the ones listed above make the clear distinction between a fluid view of the border and border identities and the ignorance of the conflicts and tensions created within nation states. Undoubtedly this is a
recipe for a web of remarkable interactions that become part of a collective Mexico-US border History, and the histories of borders everywhere. In order to understand why this time-space is especially key, we need to first understand two things: inSITE and NAFTA which are connected very closely 1992 and 1994, respectively.

As I have previously mentioned, NAFTA’s effects on Mexico were highly noticeable. Joining anthropological and economic data with theory, we can see that Tijuana has suffered at the hands of, and also been shaped by neoglobalism. The need for art comes from the need for survival in a highly competitive region in the specific time-space continuum of the post-NAFTA Mexico-US border. inSITE’s exploration into the conditions created by the border was a critical turning point in explaining this dynamic. “Since the mid-1990’s, inSITE [was originally] carried out on a biennial basis and consists of the assembly of ephemeral pieces of installation art in public spaces” (Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego [MCASD], 2006a, p. 243). MCASD Curator Rachael Teagle, said…”…inSITE, a binational presentation of site-specific art that takes place in the San Diego-Tijuana border region, began simultaneously to coalesce the arts community and draw attention from the international art world” (MCASD, 2006a, p. 102).

Iglesias Prieto’s (2008) testament to this condition of asymmetry manifesting itself through artistic production in Tijuana leads to the physical, conceptual, and historical reconfiguration of the city and the borderlands. Cruz, the de la Torres, Morales, and Glaubitz’ artistic visions become the wallpaper that redesigns and redefines the makeup, shape, and therefore, also the limits of the urban space, making it more suitable to the needs of its people. A central them that emerges here is identity, and the role it plays in the reshaping of the city and the borderlands.

The 2006 San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art TRANSactions exhibit of “Contemporary Latin American and Latino Art” aimed to “demonstrate the broad gamut of expressive artistic modes and styles and to examining the zones of convergence tension and

16 Neo-global, neo-liberal, and neo-capitalist are all terms that have referred to the current state of accelerated economic and technological global flows for purposes of trade, etc.
expansion seen in the various paths taken by each artist” (MCASD, 2006b, p. 16). Hanor explains the artists’ play on “cultural locations and identities” that they paradoxically reinforce and question at the same time:

Interested in revitalizing existing artistic language and forms, the artists in TRANSactions often infuse their work with a social commentary based on local and global references. While engaging in a global dialogue, they explore and parody cultural locations and identities even as they uphold and transgress them…often resisting classification as Latin American” or “Latino” the artists in TRANSactions create works that tell stories of cultural hybrids, political collisions, and universal consequences. Many of the works in TRANSactions question eternal and internal perceptions about what is specifically Latin American, instead suggesting the inevitable hybridization of every culture (As cited by MCASD, 2006b, p. 26).

Though Hanor should be more careful with terms such as “universal” and “inevitable,” what is clear from TRANSactions is that the introspective art from the border region is increasingly headed toward questioning traditional markers versus representing conceived and perceived identity politics.

Artists like ERRE have used the platform of conceptual art as a tool for disseminating messages about values of social justice, like equal rights for immigrants, preservation of culture, conscious city planning and building. Through his art, Ramírez becomes an agent of social change, by intervening Tijuana’s, as well as the rest of the world’s spaces, developed and subaltern, and transforming them into canvasses on which to paint strong emotional messages that are deeply important and sacred to him. Practicing art has given ERRE the opportunity to act on his agency for social change by providing a foundation from which to build on his imagination. Marcos, whose life path has made him a lawyer, a carpenter, and an artist by education and by practice, has expressed ideas of multidimensionality and freedom of thought. He has produced art whose trajectory has gone from local to increasingly global in significance, although it has still remained a prominent presence in his hometown, Tijuana. This shift makes his collective work glo-cal, or a globally relevant local product.

Keeping in line with this specific socio-cultural climate that characterizes the Mexico-US border, I choose to apply the filter of art because I believe that art has the ability to imagine something “too good be true,” and then to actually reproduce it—assuming that in order to produce something, one must first imagine it. I argue that the transborder condition/experience has been successfully reproduced through the art of those who can
identify with the feeling of having lived the transborder experience. The endless possibilities of a creative process such as that of making art with a specific objective in mind have lead to the recognition of a relatively modern artistic practice that far transgresses “art for art’s sake.” Garcia-Canclini, Iglesias Prieto, Berelowitz, Prieto, Peralta, Yepez, and Ybarra-Frausto among many others have seriously considered art as a mechanism for transformation, for raising political awareness, for advocacy of environmental and social justice, has come to gain much more interest, meaning and validity over the years and the evolution of artistic production in the Mexico-US border Region.

Social changes and upward movements that artists have achieved through their work, are perhaps most apparent in public art, which imprints is visible mark in the daily urban spaces so often is taken for granted. One obvious example of art transforming the urban border space is La Casa del Tunel, an old narco-trafficking tunnel transformed into a public art venue, studios, galleries and a rooftop performance space. Luis Ituarte (2009), Casa del Tunel founder and the first Vice President of the border Council of Arts and Culture, says he has a problem with the idea of changing Tijuana, because it implies that we should get rid of what is already there. Ituarte (2009), who prefers the word transformation over change, says, “The artists...are the ones who are going to show people the way...but people in San Diego should change their attitude about Tijuana and start looking at what is good here, other than what is bad. And there is a lot of good here...a lot.”
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 METHODOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS AND APPLICATIONS OF THEORY: ERRE’S WORK AS AN APPROPRIATED SUBJECTIVE LENS

As has been stated in the previous sections of this thesis, the central question I am hoping to illuminate is how Marcos Ramírez ERRE’s artistic productions express, interpret, and question traditional notions of the border and the transborder condition/experience? How does his work contribute to reconfiguring the México-US border space and practices, and furthermore, what global implications does this have?

Look into the kaleidoscope of Ramírez’ work and one finds the positions he has challenged have evolved from local to increasingly global over time, changing with the ebb and flow of his own personal journey through life. Morphing and adapting to his own personal reality in a creative way has allowed him to avoid getting stuck in the struggles of his immediate condition, and to develop mechanisms with which to question it, focusing on the agency of his experience as an artist in this particular place and time. Ramírez’ artistic productions play with the constructs of space and identity among others in order to open up new possibilities for discourse and exchange of ideas related to the border region, that tie it more into the grand scheme of worldwide affairs. His work also raises consciousness about the rich complexity of the transborder condition/experience.

A global concern in virtually all areas of study, the call for meaningful discourses that engender a greater level of mutual human understanding is ever growing. As ideas of humanity and life evolve, so do ideas in art. A historically adaptive discipline, art acts as a mechanism to allow people to creatively design their own experiences of life by promoting unique expressions of multidimensionality in identity—in other words, to intentionally carve their own distinct life paths out of the ever-shifting world around them. Simplified “othering” based on factors such as race, religion, and sex becomes a lot less relevant when we understand that each person is multi-dimensionally dissimilar to the next—in ways that have
nothing to do with these categories. We need to continue to develop more meaningful discourses about difference and the other in order to better understand ourselves as citizens of humanity.

Although previously overlooked as unimportant in the midst of the intense political, social, and economic global dynamics, recent studies that break boundaries of rhetoric show that art is actually critical to consider in the particular case of fostering human understanding on the Mexico-US border. The reason for this is embedded in the ever-changing fast-paced nature of the region that leaves no time for interpretation, calls for an appropriate mechanism. By definition, art is fluid, fast-evolving, and free. ERRE said in a recent interview, that thus art is essentially pure, like a child, he will come and tell you exactly what he thinks.” Perhaps this means there is something to learn from the honest child in the case of this border at Tijuana/San Diego. How can we develop an appropriate methodology to translate this language into meaningful discourses about our transborder condition and experiences?

I started this research with the intention to get a clearer picture of how art challenges the institutional representations of reality—the rules, regulations, and most importantly, the boundaries these institutions place on our free human movements. One way to achieve this is to look at a small, culturally concentrated cross section of the globe where this phenomenon is particularly apparent, for instance, an international border, which is a physical case in point of an institutionally enforced boundary that inhibits free human movement.

Completing my graduate coursework in borderlands studies while living in close proximity to the Tijuana/San Diego border—which many have observed is the most exploited and advertised border region in the world—has given me the opportunity to look at cultural movements that reject the notion of the border as a natural reality, questioning why, how, and who put it there. Crossing the border into Tijuana and hearing hundreds of different narratives of Tijuanenses was an eye-opening experience that made me conclude that this city is the consequence of cultural mixture, juxtaposition and contradiction.

Artists like Marcos Ramírez ERRE, Tanya Aguiñiga, Jaime Ruis Otis, yonkeArt members and inSITE participators have shown us that because of its colonial history and the series of events that have led up to the current state of Tijuana of being the factory/junkyard (of the United States, and geopolitical placement: that Tijuana has responded with a noteworthy culture of recycling. As Iglesias Prieto illustrates in Emergencias, Tijuana is the
arts and culture hub of the Mexico-US border region, home to numerous of artists who have responded to the turbulent, cruel border reality through their art. The conflict and velocity inherent to a space that questions and draws from its creativity for survival, therefore engenders the tendency toward an explosion of creativity that has very apparently taken place in Tijuana. In this universe of creativity and artistic production—be it informal or formal, art, like everything else evolves and grows very fast. Although the number of artists is undetermined, its exposure and influence is evident in the makeup of the city.

Art has also grown rapidly in terms of recognition and critique. Many theorists are connecting art to much more applicable and relevant aspects of life in this particular time-space, largely because of the border art explosion. One artist that is especially visible in this cultural explosion is Marcos Ramírez “ERRE,” who works in the genre of installation art and questions the border in a subtle yet highly political fashion. ERRE’s background as a carpenter and his use of installation to intervene, question and deconstruct his urban space, evermore emphasizing the lived experience of the space makes him an appropriate subject for a thesis logically structured by Lefebvre’s dimensions of space. Furthermore ERRE is highly visible and accessible, being as he is perhaps the most widely and locally well-known visual artist from Tijuana.

I hope that taking a closer look at the most well-known artist from the most well-known border crossing could lead to some answers regarding the power of art, to affect social change, challenge power and push borders. Because my interest in ERRE’s work initially arose from my interest in studying the Mexico-US border and cultural movements that question it, I follow this same thought process in choosing my methods of analysis. More explicitly, this thought process led me from the Mexico-US border at the specific site of Tijuana/San Diego, to studying practices that explicitly question and deconstruct it, to public artists in the border region that undertake said task through the productions of their pieces, to ERRE’s artistic productions. Arriving at ERRE’s pieces, I needed to establish criteria that would allow for the selection of the ones I would be analyzing for purposes of this thesis.

Questioning constructions of space, time, identity, and experience is an age-old concept dating back as far as Plato’s Allegory of the Cave, which could also be analyzed by applying Lefebvre’s theory. The Cave would represent the physical dimension of space, or the constructed physical space around us what we tend not to question or take for granted.
such as our bodies and natural boundaries, hence the cave. In this case the Cave is Tijuana/San Diego Border. The shadows are the conceived or what is constructed in order to elicit a specific human response. We are prisoners because we conceive prisons. The experiential is the human response or in the case of the Allegory, the philosopher who comes out and realizes it is all a game, a play in which he has been given a part, and tries to tell the others that there is really nothing in the cave and that it was just an illusion. It is his agency of the human response of crossing borders of sociality which creates representational spaces through which to express our own unique individual or the lived experience from deep within.

To recap the theoretical aspect of this methodology, my approach to emphasizing the capacity of ERRE’s work for questioning and deconstructing the Tijuana/San Diego border is not grounded in a particular discipline, school of thought or philosophy. It has become clear that these theoretical canons are so widely accepted that some of the areas (Geographic and Identity) they have overlooked suffered a time gap in relevant and meaningful critical theory. Some have reached the conclusion that Border/lands Studies, Feminist Studies, and Chicana/o studies have picked up where area studies left off in questioning borders without the limits of a canon. My methodological approach, is rooted in studying an unequivocal dynamic that has impacted its cultural gamut of possibilities for transcendence and the recognition of the other, through the case study of one of its most important glo-cal actors, Marcos Ramírez ERRE.

### 3.2 Selection Criteria and Analytical Organization

The three main selection criteria for the nine pieces I analyze as part of this case study are: (1) that the piece intervene symbolic and geopolitical borders or urban spaces, (2) that the medium be classified as installation, at least in part, because installation art is designed to change the perception or function of its surrounding environment, (3) that it deal with or be influenced by the Mexico-US border/the *transborder condition* in some fashion. My preoccupation with space and the experience of crossing borders is in line with borderlands studies and some of the postmodernist theoretical understandings of geography and human movement.
Theoretical frameworks laid out by Debord, Lefebvre, Soja and others provide the foundation for a more sophisticated and critical conceptualization of our spaces. I hope to find connections between these foundations that celebrate the lived experience and artists who express their lived experiences. Specifically, the secondary sources I rely on for support include public information such as published interviews, press releases, articles and other analyses of ERRE’s art. Looking at the trajectory of his work from the years 1994 to present, allows me to focus my efforts on developing a dialogue about the artists’ installation work during an especially politically dynamic time in Mexico-US border history. For information regarding the artist, I use secondary sources such as interview transcripts published in newspapers and magazines, online articles about the artist, press releases and exhibition tickets. Most importantly, ERRE’s pieces are the focus of analysis, as I’m hoping to learn more about how ERRE as an artist, has affected the world through his work. For these, I look at photographic images of the pieces and analyzing them based on the following categories: aesthetics, historical context, transborder art context, artist’s concept and intent; appropriations of others (formal and informal), subjective response to and personal reflection on the piece, and finally, as a broad category the result of applying the question: How does this piece question the Mexico-US border on Lefebvre’s levels of space (spatially, conceptually, emotively)? This final category is broken down into physical conceptual, and experiential elements. Table 3.1, entitled Analytical Categories, shows this analytical categorical framework.

Table 3.1. Analytical Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AESTHETICS</th>
<th>HISTORICAL CONTEXT</th>
<th>CONTEXT WITHIN TRANSBORDER ART</th>
<th>ARTIST’S CONCEPT</th>
<th>INTERPRETATIONS OF OTHERS</th>
<th>SUBJECTIVE APPROPRIATION</th>
<th>LEFEBVRE/SPATIAL RETHINKING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PHYSICAL CONCEPTUAL EXPERIENTIAL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Staying true to the task of learning how art deconstructs the Mexico-US border space based on the Lefebvrian levels of space, the physical, conceptual, and the lived experience, I organize the analysis of ERRE’s pieces by the same logic. The first level of analysis focuses on pieces that question/alter the border space physically/de facto, the second level will focus on those that question/alter the concept of the border, and the third will attempt to capture an essence of how ERRE’s work has questioned/impacted the lived experience of the border for
transborder subjects. I introduce each piece with a photographic image in order of logical relevance vis-à-vis this structure, analyzing them by order of chronology within the section. Some pieces will be repeated because this is a forced division, because the division of space does not happen in practice-totally mixed in reality. The pieces blend the three levels of space, which makes them rich cultural commentaries that cannot be divided in reality.

Since I am looking at public art or art that intervenes the public urban space, becoming part of its surroundings, I focus on ERRE’s installation pieces. I elected to look at pieces that occurred after 1994, (as this was the start of ERRE’s career as a public installation artist, and pieces that questioned and altered the public border space on one or more of Lefebvre’s three dimensions of space—the physical, conceptual and emotive, or lived. Interestingly enough, NAFTA, the Zapatista Movement, and Operation Gatekeeper all took place during this critical time for Mexico-US relations. These events were deeply interwoven into and manipulated by arts in the region. The resulting pieces after applying this filter are nine in total, in chronological order: Century 21, 187 Pairs of Hands, Toy an Horse, Sing Sing Love as a First Language, Stripes and Fence Forever Homage to Jasper Johns, Road to Perdition/The Reading Project, Prejudice Project, Body of Crime, Eyes/ICE Tower.

Following this logic, in the first section of analysis, namely, the physical, four of these nine pieces come into the analytical focus. These are the four that I argue have questioned the physical layer of space, the “spatiality,” and “spatial practices,” as Lefebvre calls them (Lefebvre, 1974). For the purposes of this research, the physical level of space refers to the de facto geopolitical border between Tijuana and San Diego, signified by the border fence(s). Lefebvre also refers to this first level of space as the perceived reality as opposed to the “actual” reality, staying true to the postmodern or deconstructionist rejection of absolute truth, or an absolute answer to the question: What is reality? It is this logic which permits questioning geopolitical spaces on the physical level, and therefore opens the portal to apply this mechanism to ERRE’s art and the Mexico-US border to see which pieces fit the physical-level questioning.

Breaking down the physical-level questioning of the border into sub questions defines my specific interpretation of this concept, which will be applied to each work. Primarily, my interpretation alludes to ERRE’s questioning of the physical presence of the border wall(s) and institutional programs that uphold the border such as ICE (Immigration Customs and
Enforcement), and the Mexican police, juxtaposed with and U.S. corporations and other institutions that are able to transgress borders, eg: Maquiladoras. Furthermore, how do the (physical) pieces question the effects of the border on the physical space around it and the physical mapping out of acceptable routes for human movement? This first “physical” filter from the spatial triad is present in: Century 21, Toy an Horse, Prejudice Project, Body of Crime, and Eyes/ICE Tower. Graphic images of each of these with a description of the physical qualities they possess, followed by critical questions about their construction, statures and physical and strategic placements on the physical Mexico-US border. For example, why did ERRE’s pieces get smaller and farther from the US-Mexico Border over time until 2008?

The second component of the analysis, The Conceptual, will focus on the pieces that intervene and question the border space on the conceptual level. In other words, which of these nine pieces question the historicality17 of the Mexico-US border, or theoretical or conceived representation of the space? Again, in this specific case, “conceived” alludes to the institutional construction of the idea of geopolitical division or separation between Mexico and the United States.

For the case of ERRE’s pieces and the border, I interpret the conceptual questioning of the border by any combination of the following sub questions. How do the pieces question the concept of the Mexico-US border in a general or global sense? How do these pieces question the metaphorical/ideological/conceptual institutionalization of the borderlands? The border, as elaborated upon in the Conceptual Framework, has been naturalized by the nation-state to what the border implies institutionally speaking. How do the pieces question the history of the border and this history or “historicism’s” effects on general concepts of space and time in the region? Finally, how do they question the universal acceptance of history as absolute truth? I argue that all nine pieces I selected for this research question the border on The Conceptual; therefore, I look at how Century 21, Toy an Horse, 187 Pairs of Hands, Prejudice Project, Sing Sing Love as a First Language, Stripes and Fence Forever Homage

17 Lefebvre’s alternate term to describe the concept of the conceptual level of space
to Jasper Johns, Road to Perdition, Body of Crime, and Eyes/ICE Tower challenge representations of border space. I ask questions like: Why have ERRE’s pieces grown increasingly direct in their response to neo-globalist conceptual (or *mind*) manipulation over time? Another central component of *The Conceptual* is the factor of the specific and determined time and space political climate on the Tijuana/San Diego border at the time each piece was launched which is translated into physical spaces marked by asymmetry and illogical hypocrisy, for example the extreme militarization and immigration controls of the border in the face of free flow of goods and capital. I try to show how ERRE was not just questioning, but answering directly to a system that has built an entire “conceived reality” around us—a reality many reject in absolute. What does it mean to live in the Mexico-US borderlands—or more importantly—what does it mean to cross the Mexico-US border? Lefebvre and border theorists such as Iglesias Prieto and Canclini would argue that this depends on how and why you cross it and who you are, thereby returning the focus of the border to the individual lived experiences of *transborder subjects* and naturalizing the *transborder condition*. This experiential element takes center focus in the final level of analysis.

The *Experiential* engenders an analysis of ERRE’s pieces vis-à-vis the *experiential*, or the social aspect of the space. The experiential is the weakest part of my analysis, as I don’t have first-hand access to the pieces, so I use my own subjectivity to make some inferences regarding the *transborder experience* as understood by ERRE. In this case, this final level or layer of space refers to the crossing of the geopolitical Mexico-US border, which by Lefebvre’s (1974) logic, also encompasses the crossing of metaphorical borders, thereby breaking the binary of the Physical/Conceptual or *Perceived/Conceived* layers of space. How do these pieces question the *psychogeography* of the border, or its effects on human movement, emotion and experience and the specific space and time of each piece? How do they question the way the perceived space/conceived space or the space/time dyad denies or undercuts the importance of the human experience? Finally, and most importantly, how do these pieces illuminate the human experience’s power for breaking through the borders of space and time to arrive at the lived expression of life, thereby naturalizing the *transborder experience* as a unique fingerprint that shapes the very space and history that previously functioned to undercut it? Referring to the physical distance from the border, why
did ERRE’s pieces seem to come back “home” with a different perspective integrated into the transborder experience—increasingly stressing a more sophisticated processual vs. finished product-oriented artistic practice?

The art world has published much valuable writing and analysis around ERRE and his pieces as he has released each one. Using all that’s been published thus far, as reference points for analysis, I’m seeking strands of support for my theoretical argument that ERRE’s artistic practices question the border on Lefebvre’s spatial, conceptual, and experiential dimensions. Texts, interviews, press releases, and articles will provide support for my analyses of ERRE’s pieces on the first two of the three dimensions.

To understand The Experiential, or emotive aspect of ERRE’s questioning of the border through his pieces, I need to look at people’s recorded reactions and interactions with the work itself. These reactions are important because they’ve changed the way individuals view, interact with, and ultimately reshape their own realities as individual trans-border subjects. Where this information may not be available to me first hand, I may still make attempts to find it through spectators’ comments in reaction to the pieces that have been published by the media.

3.3 ERRE AND WORK QUESTION SEEN, KNOWN, AND LIVED MEXICO-US

To begin, I demonstrate connections I’ve made among the pieces both in process and in materials and concepts. Figure 3.1 is a diagram that shows how I perceive ERRE’s pieces to be distributed in a dialectical relationship in the Lefebvrian context on the particular Mexico-US border time-space continuum. In other words, pieces that I perceive to question the border physically, conceptually, and experimentally fall to the very middle, common space of the diagram. Table 3.2 shows ERRE’s pieces by thumbnail and year, and provides physical dimensions, spatial setting or location, and materials used. Table 3.3 lists the pieces by thumbnail again, this time displaying some of the conceptual and contextual observations of the specific space-time of the piece.

Figure 3.2 is a line graph I put together by googling estimations of distance between sites of ERRE’s exhibition sites using mapquest, and juxtaposing them with the physical characteristics retrieved from ERRE’s website. It shows the pieces’ dimensions in square feet against his corresponding position in relation to the border in miles.
This graph is intended to demystify ERRE’s pieces by making some sense of the general physical characteristic trends. For example, it can be deduced from the steady decline of the blue line (square footage) to non-existence, that ERRE’s pieces intermittently appear and disappear—married to the time-space of the border, as he comes back home to glo-calize his local space with the experiences that enriched him abroad. Size and geographic location, key physical characteristics of art, became less important with time. This is parallel to the growing general sophistication of art in which concepts and processes are increasingly valued over polished finished products. The red line indicates the steady movement in miles which has continuously and loyally brought ERRE home to his “humble beginnings” in this context of the busiest border in the world.

All of these characteristics and anti-monumental interpretations of ERRE’s work allow it to question the border in physical, critical and experiential realms. The first half of ERRE’s career to date has leaned more toward product oriented installations, whose monumentality was physical and whose interventions were deliberate and literal. The second half of his career saw a growth in processual artistic practices, less preoccupied with a
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMAGE</th>
<th>TITLE OF PIECE</th>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>DIMENSIONS</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>MATERIALS USED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Century 21</em></td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>40'x40'x12'</td>
<td>CECUT Plaza</td>
<td>wood and hardware, mattress springs, clothesline, old tires, appliances acquired second-hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>187 Pairs of Hands</em></td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>8'x34'x26'</td>
<td>CECUT Entrance</td>
<td>photography, wood, hardware, glass, paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Toy an Horse</em></td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>33'x29'x12'</td>
<td>San Ysidro-Tijuana Border Crossing</td>
<td>wood and hardware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Sing Sing Love as a First Language</em></td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>12'x20'x11'</td>
<td>SDMoCA &amp; Downtown Trolley Station</td>
<td>wrought iron, textile (sheet and pillow)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Stripes and Fence Forever Homage to Jasper Johns</em></td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>8'x10'x10'</td>
<td>New York City</td>
<td>steel, iron, brick, cinder, cement, hardware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Road to Perdition</em></td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>13'x26'</td>
<td>San Diego Side of I-5 Border Crossing</td>
<td>steel, hardware, industrial paint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Prejudice Project</em></td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>14'x44'</td>
<td>Process &amp; All over border Displayed at: SDMoCA</td>
<td>billboard, paint, steel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Body of Crime</em></td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>On top of ERRE's studio (right after crossing into TJ)</td>
<td>video documentary, car, guns, ammunition, chainsaw, paint, paper markers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Eyes/ICE Tower</em></td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>On top of ERRE's studio (right after crossing into TJ)</td>
<td>wood, hardware, commercial paint, steel/iron, security and surveillance systems, intelligence tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMAGE</td>
<td>TITLE OF PIECE</td>
<td>PROCESS/PRODUCT</td>
<td>SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL CONTEXT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Century 21" /></td>
<td><em>Century 21</em></td>
<td>Process/Product</td>
<td><em>NAFTA, Prop 187, Peso Devaluation, EZLN Movement</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Toy an Horse" /></td>
<td><em>Toy an Horse</em></td>
<td>Product</td>
<td><em>Jobs plummeting in Mexico, growth in maquiladora industry (16% from 1996)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Sing Sing Love as a First Language" /></td>
<td><em>Sing Sing Love as a First Language</em></td>
<td>Product</td>
<td><em>Ongoing, global English-only Movement (Prop 227 in CA)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Stripes and Fence Forever Homage to Jasper Johns" /></td>
<td><em>Stripes and Fence Forever Homage to Jasper Johns</em></td>
<td>Product</td>
<td><em>Bush and Fox both elected into presidential office</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Road to Perdition" /></td>
<td><em>Road to Perdition</em></td>
<td>Product</td>
<td><em>911 (2001), Patriot Act</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Prejudice Project" /></td>
<td><em>Prejudice Project</em></td>
<td>Product</td>
<td><em>Patriot Act Reauthorized, corruption cost Mexico $60 billion</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Body of Crime" /></td>
<td><em>Body of Crime</em></td>
<td>Process</td>
<td><em>Narcotrafficking related deaths</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Eyes/ICE Tower" /></td>
<td><em>Eyes/ICE Tower</em></td>
<td>Process</td>
<td><em>Enhanced Border Security Measures</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
finished product of interest to the elite art world, which is in line with art in general by collaborators such as Proyecto Civico and inSITE among others in Tijuana. It is important to mention that since my study is based on nine cases, only one of which I would viewed first-hand. It could be argued that analyzing a source through a secondary would be limiting, however, this can be compensated for through thorough research and various recorded reactions to the pieces via Internet.

As I mentioned in the methodology, I organize the analysis levels according to the Lefebvrian levels of space (1974). How do the following pieces deconstruct the Mexico-US order: (a) physically, (b) conceptually, and/or (c) experientially? I group the pieces into three levels as examples of each of the different levels of deconstruction. Pieces will overlap levels at times, if I interpret them as dialectical or trialectic(al) (Lefebvre, 1974) critiques of the border, in other words, if they question the border on two or more of these levels. I know that the interpreted results of my selection criteria do not mean that all of the pieces could not question the border on all three of the levels, since even the application of theoretical framework is subjectified by my position. Although I understand that ERRE’s art pieces all question borders on many different levels, I am choosing to divide the nine pieces into these
three levels as examples of how art can question an international border physically, conceptually, and experientially.

On level one, or The Physical, I look at how Toy an Horse, Prejudice Project, Body of Crime, and Eyes/ICE Tower question the Mexico-US border physically, or de facto. I choose to look at these pieces because their immense size and deliberate presence are particularly unmistakable and unavoidable. All of these public installations, interestingly enough, were erected during especially critical times in the Mexico-US borderlands politics which left their mark on the physical border space, and how it is perceived. The Mexican economic crash that followed the Peso Devaluation led to highs in unemployment, there was a 16% growth in the maquiladora industry, the Patriot Act was reauthorized, and corruption cost Mexico $60 billion.

On level two, or The Conceptual, the questioning of the concept of the border is my focal point. All nine of the installations in this research will appear: Century 21, Toy an Horse, 187 Pairs of Hands, Sing Sing Love as a First Language, Stripes and Fence Forever Homage to Jasper Johns, Road to Perdition/Reading Project, Prejudice Project, Body of Crime, and Eyes/ICE Tower. The Conceptual is an opportunity to reconnect the chronological history of ERRE’s artistic trajectory, and specifically, hone in on the evolution of its conceptual sophistication in critiques of the Mexico-US border. In other words, the history and evolution of his pieces seem to reflect the history and evolution of the border—ever more sophisticated, ever more “organized,” ever more intentional. Looking at the subject matter of his work, the intention ERRE critiques is the comprehensive intention to violently control and manipulate our individual experiences of life. Some historical markers of this manipulation are war and the drive to dominate through corporate greed and organized global bloody brutality, the illogical and unjust militarization of border lines between nations, the willingness to conceal data or anything else, for that matter, that stands in the way of capitalist growth and power, and the structural marginalization of people pushed to the peripheries of modern architecture.

As ERRE reminds us of the pieces of history we may fail to acknowledge, he is evidently on to something. Are we (people of the Tijuana-San Diego borderlands) stuck in a tempo-spatial trap, or imprisoned by what we view and what we believe? If so, what can break this binary? Although all of ERRE’s work speaks to the experiential power of
questioning spatial constructs, perhaps his later work suggests that it is the lived human experience that unlocks the floodgates for movement and expression to flow over, under and through borders—revealing all through the use of technological media present in the most recent pieces. Level three, or *The Experiential*, elaborates on this humanization of temporal-spatiality.

Likewise on *The Experiential*, all nine pieces question paradigms of the lived experience of the Mexico-US border. ERRE would spend a lot of time in Tijuana and San Diego during recent years—crossing, photographing, videotaping, revealing, intervening and living the border. Identity comes into play more than ever, as Marcos embarks on a journey into his own personal experience of the border, while at the same time looking at other personalized border narratives. Size is increasingly less relative in ERRE’s work, emphasizing the performance, or documentary element. Furthermore, documentaries record individual experiences and emphasize the importance of the lived element of the production of our space as Lefebvre would call it. On *the Experiential*, individual human transborder experiences are being recorded and deconstructed. People’s responses to ERRE’s pieces and the emotion they evoke depending on the position of the viewer, and even reactions to the art’s subject matter, also play an important role, as they show how their individual experiences/narratives of the border are shaped or represented in ERRE’s work.

### 3.4 Subjective Appropriation Process

Due to the fact that one of the strengths of ERRE’s work is precisely the capacity it has for questioning aspects that the public commonly accepts as naturalized or normal/the norm, I depart from an experimental methodology. In this study I include myself as a second-hand spectator, second-hand because I am not viewing the pieces as they are on display, but instead through flat photographic images of them in art books and on the Internet. Nevertheless, I am viewing the pieces and have a personal appropriation process based on my own condition in relation to the Border and the rest of the world for that matter, also in relation to art and practices that question boundaries and institutional definitions. Thus, my sixth analytical category is a methodological opportunity to include my own personal appropriation of each piece as a process of registering the piece through a subjective condition (mine). This methodological strategy lays an objective grid over my subjectivity,
rationalizing the initial emotional reaction of the subject (me). The reflexive comes into play when this subject places herself within the object of research and observes from within, simultaneously observing the object itself and her own process of observation. The reflexive subject is engaged as I explore my own multiple subjectivities as a *transborder subject* living in San Diego. My identity as an Iranian-American woman, outsider or *other* in the Border region, allows for a subjective view that ironically also adds a certain element of objectivity to analyzing questions around Mexico-US because of my historical and ethnic *otherness* to this particular border region\(^{18}\). Specifically, what does my reaction to ERRE’s pieces say about the global capacity of art to speak to a subject’s transnational experience in a way that resonates with that subject’s own feeling about the experience?

My subjectivity makes this thesis a personal project in addition to an academic one, serving two distinct purposes. Besides its function as methodological strategy, this type of analysis allows me to discover connections that enrich the research on a deeper introspective level. Because there is a connection between mine and ERRE’s *meta-discourses* of questioning borders, my own internal borders have the potential to act as a catalyst for opening the subjective eye wider to be able to relate more closely in a sense, to ERRE’s message from an informed outsider’s perspective. The echos are multidimensional and therefore intersect each other, adding another degree of complexity to analysis. For example, as ERRE is not producing art for just art’s sake, I am not writing just to write. There is a specific human rights agenda at play here at the heart of observations of the border. Secondly, my interpretations and conceptualizations of the border at Tijuana/San Diego have changed and evolved drastically due to increased crossing and academic exposure to the real-life border time-space and the *transborder* experiences brought about by contemporary art practices and ERRE’s work in specific. I now see myself as a translator\(^{19}\) or interpreter of

\(^{18}\) I have dual nationality to the United States and Iran, yet I am considered neither Iranian, nor quite American, and most certainly not Mexican, or Chicana. Iranian American is the closest term to define me within the Ethnicity Canon, although in the Race Canon, I am considered Caucasian because my ancestors allegedly originated from the Caucasus Mountains.

\(^{19}\) I worked as a Spanish/Farsi interpreter/translator for VAWA clients and Asylees and C.C.A. detainees at Casa Cornelia Law Center and translate Spanish literature into English, especially for use in this thesis, e.g.,
narratives, of discourses, of movements across and around this border. This could logically indicate that there is then a possibility for broadening others’ basis of questioning re this and other borders. There is then, a collective of people, who logically also have changed their idea of the border due to their exposure to artistic and cultural experiences of transborder movements. More importantly, there are those narratives that were previously uncounted as part of a larger reality before these movements mapped the communication channels. I seek to join the camp that highlights inhumanity as a method of fighting it in the world of today’s people. It is evident that each one of our subjective experiences are so elemental to the greater existence of a universe and we must use this chance well. To have more, and less permeable borders blocking the relational interactions across them for certain aspects, such as migration, while encouraging these interactions for labor flow purposes in the current border built environment—it just plain doesn’t make sense to me. It is unnatural, as ERRE has expressed so consistently in all of his work.

Norma Iglesias Prieto’s writings, oral comments, and our discussions during advising meetings.
CHAPTER 4

CONTEXT AND ANTECEDENTS

4.1 THE PRESENT TIJUANA SAN/DIEGO TIME-SPACE

Figure 4.1 is an older photo, but a clear one, nonetheless, that illustrates appropriatization and institutional reorganization of the Mexico-US border at the San Ysidro Legal Point of Entry, by its acronym LPOE or SYPOE. I juxtaposed this telling photograph (see Figure 4.2) with a diagram indicating a political science attempt to define human movement with a word bank of 27 words, some of which are repeated or recombined in order to then be able to draw conclusions about the Mexico-US border and its people. This diagram that attempts to analyze movements of transborder people (those living at/being at/belonging to both sides of the border) using numbers and probabilities, while intricately detailed, contains a fundamental flaw. Although the statistical markers represented below may account for the controlled scope of border movement, they are clearly being re-interpreted and rearranged by a subjective individual. Just as the structures in the photograph are guiding the possibilities of the negative space around them and the movement of individual identities within, the analytical diagram has been generated with the purpose of limiting or condensing the reality of the Border paradigmatically and thereby reinforcing its function as a limit. The description says “rectangles contain quantities computed in the sub models described in relations (1)–(4) and the ovals contain decision variables by the U.S. government.”

Grouping this body of information together and calling it “decision variables by the U.S. government” is a very absurd and scary concept when one considers first of all, that this is a chart that directly aims to show strategies for attacking from all angles so as to keep Mexicans out of California—never stated, of course as a “decision variable” although perhaps it is the largest of them all. But there is a more interesting underlying secondary effect that happens here. All of the categorical or natural implications behind these variables, the stuff in the negative space, is simply overlooked, like the Wizard of Oz hiding behind the curtain, the one you’re not supposed to pay attention to. It would be interesting to blow up this diagram and cut and paste real photographs of the detention beds in the Corrections.
Figure 4.1. Photo of the Tijuana-San Diego border crossing.

Figure 4.2. Decision variables versus outcomes of homeland security measures.
Corporations of America, of an actual *worksite inspection* (or raid) while terror and anxiety mark the faces of workers, of an *immigrant removal* (or deportation) while her dehydrated and terrified children are ripped away from her violently by Border Patrol. The so-called “detention policy for Mexicans” has meant *these* realities on the Border today.

In the current context of 2010 on the Mexico-US Border, a number of “border improvement” projects have emerged. The central aim of the San Ysidro Smart Border Coalition is to direct US General Services Administration’s (GSA) focus to expand the San Ysidro legal border entry point’s efficiency and capacity to facilitate trade and commerce on the Mexico-US Border. The Coalition’s Position Paper stated the following:

The San Ysidro Smart Border Coalition (SYSBC) fervently requests an official focus within the structure of the US GSA for border stations projects—separate from personnel designated to work on courthouse projects. These are two very different projects requiring very different attention, resources and personnel. The creation of a border stations program will facilitate resolution of all issues herein scribed; and

We respectfully request changes immediately be made to GSA policy, guidelines, design guides and federal building fund allowances permitting the inclusion of private commerce within border facilities – to include but not be limited to authorizing GSA the ability to create space within border facilities for private rental, to charge rents to private companies, lease from private companies and coexist with private companies within same facilities. (GSA, 2010)

The US General Services Administration, an independent agency of the United States government, originally established to provide management and support for federal agencies by supplying transportation and offices for U.S. government use and federal employees, implementing cost-minimizing policies. Interestingly, San Ysidro’s Chamber of Commerce and other local actors are still pushing for this body to extend its scope of work into the private sector, creating private business opportunities for the revenue of mainly one side of the Border. GSA’s directive is "to use expertise to provide innovative solutions for our customers in support of their missions and by so doing foster an effective, sustainable, and transparent government for the American people" (GSA, 2010).

The contractor’s PROJECT DESCRIPTION, released in February 2010 showed the sheer volume of traffic that passes through Tijuana/San Ysidro, indicating that this number would likely even triple in the following decades by the current rate of growth:

The San Ysidro LPOE is the busiest land port in the world. The existing, outdated 30-year-old facility is obsolete and can no longer support the facilitation nor
enforce the missions of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). The Port currently processes an average of 50,000 northbound vehicles and 25,000 northbound pedestrians per day. The San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) predicts an increase in vehicle traffic at San Ysidro of up to 70% by the year 2030. (GSA, 2010)

The project proposed changes such as: pavement on currently unpaved inspection areas, Inspection Booths for vehicles, vehicle seizure structure and impound areas, and employee parking lots.

All of these basic physical categories aim to encapsulate all possible corrections necessary to stimulate and maintain the transborder movements of capital and commercial interest, drawing a plan to reconfigure the Border without giving any consideration to the health and safety of border crossers in Tijuana/San Diego. The Healthy Border 2010 Initiative is yet another highly specified public health project that seeks to append a general health interest to the plan of local officials for commercial expansion. As the committee’s website proclaims:

The overarching goals of the Healthy Border 2010 initiative are:
1. Improve the quality and increase the years of healthy life, and
2. Eliminate health disparities.

Even with the assumed positive intentions behind these types of physical health measures to attract commerce and improve the quality of life for border residents and transborder subjects, there is something lacking in order to complete an experientially liberating model of how to conceive our border region. The individual narrative is greatly downplayed, and the possibilities for recognizing a transcultural richness that incorporates higher levels of re-thinking and re-imagining our time-space. Nor do they address the root institutional changes, for that matter, that need to be made within the law enforcement realm of the border in order to prevent or to lessen some of these ill-effects such as mortality at the border. Rejection of the other is a common barrier to the recognition of a coherent narrative of the borderlands. For example, Tijuana, while notorious amongst Gringos for its thrills, lawlessness and hyperactivity (Romero, 2008) has still been commonly rejected as a counterpart to its sister city San Diego. Homeland Security strategies and trade regulations focus efforts on “pushing the border away” from US developed areas Raul Cárdenas from Torolab which is a collective workshop of contextual studies that presents interesting research topics or problems said in a 2004 interview “Tijuana has more to do with science fiction novels than with books of
Mexican History.” Iglesias Prieto (2008) draws from Cardenas’ interpretation to deduce that “Tijuana is just as affected by fiction, then, as its crude day to day existence.”

As Cardenas (in Montezemolo et al., 2006) reports, the Tijuana/San Diego border region doesn’t resemble traditional or historical depictions of space. The heightened complexity that characterizes Tijuana/San Diego truly cannot be encapsulated in words, but I attempt to paint a portrait that alludes to this region’s numerous essences. The Mexico-US border, a 1951 mile-long line20 along the Southwest of the United States and the Northeast of Mexico, is a fast paced and dynamic region that has been has been marked by the footsteps of globalization, societal unrest, and asymmetry. Tijuana, the largest city on this border and San Diego’s southern sister city, is encapsulated in numbers by scholars, the media, artists, and others. Leah Ollman’s (2006) article highlights an expression of Tijuana by Norma Iglesias Prieto and Nortec Collective’s Pete Mogt in Strange New World. Iglesias Prieto provided the sociological statistics and Mogt provided the “soundtrack,” from the well-known Nortec song, “Tijuana makes me happy.” The findings were as follows:

There are more than 251,000 daily crossings between Tijuana and San Diego (2003). Around 40,000 tourists visit Tijuana every day. 45% of them spend less than three hours in the city (2003). Approximately 60% of the tourists in Tijuana are Mexicans living in the United States. (2004). In 2003, 5 of every 10 TV sets purchased in North America (México, Canada, and the U.S.) were assembled in Tijuana. Tijuana is the city with the most automobiles per capita in Mexico, nearly one per household. Most of them are old models purchased in the United States. 37 percent of its homes have no running water. Only 30% of homes in Tijuana were built by professional construction workers. On average, 1 undocumented worker dies everyday trying to cross to the United States. 1 in every 3 people arriving in Tijuana in transit towards the United States. An estimated 50% of Tijuana residents do not hold a visa to enter the United States. Tijuana’s per capita income is 5 times smaller than San Diego’s. The unemployment rate in Tijuana is 1% compared to 3.8% in the rest of Mexico and 4% in San Diego. Commuter workers make up 10% of Tijuana’s economically active population, and they generate 20% of Tijuana’s salaries. Tijuana’s urban region grows by 8.6 acres a day. Tijuana’s population has doubled during the last 14 years 1 in 3 inhabitants of Tijuana is under the age of 15. 30% of Tijuana’s

20 Norma Iglesias Prieto’s homepage cites SDSU Regional Institute of Californias:http://advancement.sdsu.edu/marcomm/features/2006/diasdelosmuertos.html
population lives in dangerous areas, including hillsides that are prone to mudslides. Approximately 50% of homes in Tijuana are self-constructed, built with materials discarded in the U.S. Garage doors are used as walls, industrial pallets as fences, freeway signs as roofs, and tires as foundations. (MCASD, 2006a, p. 16)

Statistics such as these are a testament to the paradoxical nature of Tijuana’s topographic and demographic makeup. To think that half of our television sets are assembled in the same place we dump them once they’re no longer of use to us. Beyond a reading that focuses on the obvious deficits Tijuana engenders in comparison to its northern neighbor, San Diego, Iglesias Prieto highlights some interesting insight that alludes to how this relationship has affected the everyday lives of transborder people in numbers. “Approximately 50% of homes in Tijuana are self-constructed, built with materials discarded in the U.S.” This finding in and of itself is monumental, as it reveals more than a century-old toxic dumping cycle has been the source of building materials for at least half of Tijuana’s family homes.

Ironically, dumping our industrial waste into Tijuana has been largely undisputed to the point that it has been able to continue into the present day. The result has been lead exposure related limb deformation in babies amongst many other horrible effects on Mexican health. In a country whose population has “doubled during the last 14 years” largely due to the labor demand created by the North American Free Trade Agreement and Globalization, where a third of the people is under 15 years of age, health implications become quite imperative. The incredible reality is that people’s health is knowingly being put in danger by their own governments’ self interest corporate driven policy.

A clear example comes to mind recollecting a walk through a typical village of maquila workers in Mexican Otay border region. The smell of putrid human waste, and the toxic contamination coming straight from the Maquiladoras themselves mixed together and seemed to release a noxious cloud over the sadly desolate surrounding space. Dwellings made of worn wooden planks, cardboard, old tires, mattress springs, pieces of plumbing and tile bathroom floors lined both sides of the blue, purple, orange and red “river” that flowed down from the industrial worksite. Expressions on the faces of the people made it look as though they had not completely accepted their situation—as though this was the eternal internal battlefield where they resided. These effects have been largely overlooked, and sometimes even concealed, which has led people to think the worst—generating conclusions that these health effects could possibly even be population control efforts driven by the neo-
capitalist powers that be. How else, after all, could these violations of human rights be allowed to continue in the name of free trade and democratic government?

The North American Super corridor operation (NASCO) Official Statement claimed that “The secretaries committed to establishing processes to increase bilateral transportation cooperation, ‘recognizing that these efforts stimulate economic growth and improve the quality of life for their two peoples.” (Consulate General of the United States, 2010) Free Trade bodies such as NAFTA and NASCO designers have not acquired the best reputations in backing its claimed intentions. In reality, that the NASCO Mexican, American, and Canadian Secretaries “are committed to establishing processes to increase bilateral transportation cooperation…” [in the interest of economic growth, that]…improve the quality of life for their two peoples” (Consulate General of the United States, 2010) isn’t evident, judging by the growing disparities between US and Mexican life which are most evident at the borderlands of the two nations. There are those who argue that NAFTA broke its promise to protect freedom when its exploitation of cheap labor reached exponential highs. This is a potential indicator that our current socio-economic design is based on a lie. According to a study funded by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 10 years after NAFTA was signed into law, the border has not improved the quality of life for people living around it—especially to the south. The 2004 report by John Audley, NAFTA’s promise and reality lessons from Mexico for the hemisphere, made interesting conclusions, though perhaps incomplete in capturing the devastating emotional reality of the worst “unintended effects” of NAFTA south of the border. Interestingly enough, the report failed to mention Tijuana explicitly even once in its entirety. In all fairness, this was not the aim of the investigation, which was intended to analyze economic impacts of the Agreement:

NAFTA has not helped the Mexican economy keep pace with the growing demand for jobs… The agricultural sector, where almost a fifth of Mexicans still work, has lost 1.3 million jobs since 1994…. Policy makers, then, should not expect free-trade agreements to “solve” migration problems. The economic and social realities that drive migration will endure through and behave independently of such agreements. In the end, acknowledging these realities and engaging in the sensible and coordinated—even joint—management of migration may be the only viable option. (Audley, 2004)

NAFTA, according to Audley (2004), taught politicians not to try to explain or “‘solve’ migration problems” through free-trade. The chilling conclusion that can be extrapolated from the study supports the suspicion that policy makers continue to ignore the “the
economic and social realities that drive migration” in the interest of eliminating trade controls, hoping that reducing migration flows over the border will be an added windfall. More importantly, Audley (2004) almost radically, recommend a jointly managed border as “the only viable option.” Desperate times call for desperate measures. Families who have been separated for years because of immigration laws or single mothers in villages in Southern Mexican states from which the men have virtually all gone over the border to send remittances are among some of the harsh and realities of neoglobalist era Mexico-US transborder condition. A freelance blogger, Nezua the “unapologetic mexican,” wrote an insightful truth to power response in 2009 to allegations that the Border Patrol smuggled PSYOP-Corridos into Mexico. On February 15th, 2009, she wrote:

You want less border crossings? You want less of people trying to level the playing field to improve their lives? Then seek another kind of equilibrium. An economic and moral one. If you maintain the Border as a one-way valve meant to swell our nation with cash at the expense of all others, you struggle to maintain a very painful façade and one day it will fall right on top of you. (Nezua, 2009)

The alternative views represented here are all part of the greater questioning of the inherent power and control in our conceived and perceived borders, constructed as a contemporary world reality by which we all must abide, or face serious and dangerous consequences.

4.2 VISUAL ARTS PRACTICES NORTH OF THE BORDER

Comparing two leaders in artistic production from opposite sides of the border, the subtlety which Antin employs in his discussion of the bohemian dandy evokes flavors of Edmund White’s expression of the Parisian paradox of social conservatism and anarchy. These views contrasts with the confrontation ERRE employs in his highly provocative pieces that now invade our private and public spaces on deeper levels. Although Antin and his followers hold a high status in art and played an important role in defining the postmodern canon, San Diego was in general not active in comparison with its Southern neighbor. Art and Popular Culture’s section on “Postmodern Literature” hold that:

Literary postmodernism was officially coronated in the United States with the first issue of boundary 2, subtitled "Journal of Postmodern Literature and Culture", which appeared in 1972. David Antin, Charles Olson, John Cage, and the Black Mountain College school of poetry and the arts were integral figures in the intellectual and artistic exposition of postmodernism at the time. boundary 2 remains an influential journal in postmodernist circles today. (Postmodernism, n.d.)
Leah Ollman’s article for the LA Times, on March 26, 2009 reveals that:

San Diego is a sleeper in the art world, always overshadowed by that rather larger cultural engine 120 miles to the north. If institutional and commercial infrastructure has often been the city’s weakness, its community of artists has consistently been its strength. Much of the credit goes to UC San Diego, whose visual arts department was founded in the late 1960s as a conceptual enterprise in itself and emerged over subsequent decades as a haven for experimentation, interdisciplinary practice and impassioned irreverence. Unfortunately, a thorough history of the department and its broad impact has not yet been written; a show at Cardwell Jimmerson Contemporary Art serves as a compelling proposal for just such a text.

It can be argued that the California variant of Conceptual Art began in San Diego, during the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. Separate from and in addition to John Baldessari’s historic National City work, there was at about the same time a sudden influx of scholars, artists, and students to the La Jolla campus of the University of California that effectively read that once sleepy outpost into a new cultural center. “San Diego and the origins of conceptual art in California” is a study of that moment as it found expression in a new and particular form of art making.

While San Diego slept, Tijuana worked. The comfort to sleep doesn’t exist as it does in San Diego, because in Tijuana, people know they must recreate and reimagine in order to survive. It is in this spirit, that inSITE, a series of elaborate transborder art projects that paved the way for the contemporary body of public art that takes place in and/or from the Mexico-US border today.

Residents of the Mexico-US border region have responded to the long-standing existence and gradual worsening of its harsh realities in a number of ways, of which arts and cultural expressions have been especially prominent in the past two decades. The development of art on the Mexico-US border has been a process with a world of different theories about its importance and focus. However, not always has the border itself been a central focal point for artists in the region.

Partially due to the absence of immigration regulations before the enforcement of the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act, as well as the absence of a physical barrier before the border fence that was erected in 1994, the aesthetically pleasing landscape art of the 1970’s in Tijuana had a very a romantic, traditional tone that didn’t at all address the reality of existing on the fringe of a border, even seeming to run away from the transborder condition altogether. Over time, along with other movements such as the Postmodern and Feminist movements in Europe, North America, and Mexico, the growing awareness of the
border’s existence gave way to a growing cultural tendency to focus on transgressing the border.

4.3 Tijuana and the Emergence of inSITE

Although these theoretical debates are central to cultural evolution and more sophisticated discourses, there is a critical element that has often gone unrecognized, as George Yúdice points out in his eye-opening LatinArt.com article entitled, “Art and Social Space: The collaborative Art of inSITE: Producing the Cultural Economy.” Yúdice (2001) raises questions about “the return [of ‘cultural capital’] for the local population.” He criticizes writers who: “hark back to the avant-garde notion of bringing art and life together, yet do not appreciate that life (including the everyday arrangements for the projects developed for inSITE) flows through a capillary profusion of macro- and micro-institutions and networks of individuals” (Yúdice, 2001). Similarly, Iglesias Prieto and Georg Schlöhammer, among others have emphasized the importance of recognizing and discerning the politics and negotiation processes of public art, and the cultural capital generated by such negotiations. This critical thinking paired with “the concern to see what is presently being produced in the art-theoretical activities being carried out in very specific places in order to draw conclusions about where the interfaces are...“ (Zanichelli, 2007). In inSITE’s Situations, inSITE’05 Artistic Director Osvaldo Sánchez, tells the story of how inSITE started and his own individual transborder experiences with the project. Interestingly, many of these institutional barriers are overcome and negotiated through artistic practice and production.

My first approach to inSITE happened whilst living in Mexico City in 95, three years after it had started. inSITE has always been a project that has been focused on the Border area with little ambition in terms of impacting on the art world. In 95 I was in Mexico organising the International Forum on Contemporary Art Theory (FITAC) and I invited Michael Krichman and Carmen Cuenca, the two Executive Directors to participate in a discussion on public practices and to present inSITE. Michael and Carmen are not here today but they are owed all the credit for having developed this project; they are the people who have been supporting the project for decades. inSITE began in 92, the second was in 94, and the third one was in 97. I was invited by the Executive Directors to visit the 97 exhibition. At that time I had a Cuban passport and I saw only one part of the project actually the American side, because I was not able to cross the Border twice. In 1997 and 2000, inSITE invited a team of four curators to work together and in 2000 I was invited to be a part of that curatorial team. (inSITE, 2005)
Meanwhile, artistic and cultural activities of Chicanos on the other side of the border, had been highly political in tone since it first identified closely with *El Movimiento* of the 60s, and later called out the indigenous, *lo indígena*, out-loud in its political murals and paintings depicting the humble strife of laborers juxtaposed with the majestic aesthetic of Aztec gods and goddesses. Muralists and other portrait artists depicted scenes of traditional Mexican and Chicano customs, glorified gang violence, and *Calaveras*, or decorative skulls from the sacred Mexican Day of the Dead, pachucos, etc. Max Benavidez (2002) wrote: “To take from one’s own culture, add elements from the American and European mainstream and avant-garde, and create something new is the hallmark of modern Chicano art” (p. 13). Benavidez (2002) says that Chicano art’s aesthetic antecedents are “‘los tres grandes’ of Mexican muralism:” Rivera, Siqueiros, Orozco; “the hyper-selfconscious portraitist Frida Kahlo; the assertively nonconformist *pachuco* street style of the early 1940s; and the visual bravura of LA’s ubiquitous Mexican-American gang graffiti…” (p. 13)–last but not least, the city of LA itself. Some writers have observed that art tended to run away from the border during the nineteen seventies and eighties, until the *Latino explosion* that happened in states such as California, New York, and Florida.

Shortly after the height of the Chicano movement, losing its political base, Chicano art of the 1970s also lost its political tone. 1980s artists in the border region were classified as “border artists”, if they fit the specific criteria of questioning such as the famous *Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo*, according to Jo-Anne Berelowitz, “traversed the border not only in terms of ideals and composition of members, but also in terms of artistic sources and strategies, crossing the boundaries of nations, hemispheres, cultures, and media as well as the hierarchical divisions between high and low art” (Dear & Leclerc, 2003, p. 161).

Similar to Anzaldúa, who made literary art inspired by the concept of crossing the border, BAW/TAF exhibited their productions on both sides, and consisted of members from diverse talents with diverse backgrounds, with different interpretations of the borderlands, thereby crossing borders metaphorically and physically in their work. BAW/TAF lent itself to question political practices on a more global scale, identifying less heavily with the Chicano Movement, and more with themes such as utopia and nature overriding the existence of the border. As Antonio Prieto (1999) put it in his article, “Art as a Political Strategy”, This double task - being critical while at the same time proposing a utopian borderless future —
was undertaken with the tools of conceptual art. Coming back to the idea of questioning what has historically been thought of as “given,” artists who employ conceptual art techniques provoke thought about virtually every aspect of life. Rachel Bailey Jones’ PhD Dissertation Border Theory, Nationalism and Transnational Art Pedagogy held that:

Border artists create images/experiences that draw on the visual semiotic codes of multiple cultures. Border space exists not just at the physical, legal border between two nation-states; it is a space that exists metaphorically and culturally wherever there is an overlap or negotiation of cultural codes. (Bailey Jones, 2004, p.4)

BAW/TAF’s philosophy, less grounded in the social realism inherent to the Movimiento art of the 60s and 70s and heavily influenced by the Conceptual Art Movement, was that artists were agents that placed an important part in breaking down the border through their imaginations and activities. Prieto (1999) confirms that not until the early eighties did art in the border region “explicitly [address] border politics” and deliberately identify itself as "border art."

[Border Artists’] art is politically charged, and assumes a confrontational stance vis-à-vis both Mexican and U.S. government policies. This generation was directly influenced by the Chicano artistic production of the seventies, which often navigated the limits of high and popular culture. (Prieto, 1999)

Prieto (1999) brings up some important points about this “confrontational” art form. First, neither the US nor the Mexican government is immune to its criticism of corrupt or unjust political practices. Second, the art born of the Chicano Movement played a great role in changing the shift of art on the Mexican side of the border, which then created a dual push of artistic production focused on similar issues from both sides of the border (Prieto, 1990). Still, the women’s and feminist narratives were greatly left out of the Chaco Movement, and the sexism led to the cultural and intellectual uproar that is the Chicana Feminist Movement. In 1988, a group of women from both sides of the border formed Las Comadres, a binational group of women interested in artistic production and transcendence. According to Joanne Berelowitz,

Marguerite Waller has noted, they constituted an "affinity group," drawn together by their sense of exclusion from the hegemonic (malestream) culture, still in the "'nice nice' phase of multicultural feminist interaction." All experienced the excitement of encountering the ethnic "other" and of learning about new worlds. As a former member commented:
Women in the group wanted to find out what is Spanish, what is Mexican, what is Chicana, what is Anglo. There was a curiosity about how the other side lives. There was, in addition, a genuine desire to know and connect with "the other side" and to construct a utopian community based on the theoretical readings that they had adopted as their ideology and blueprint. They wanted to achieve what Anzaldúa (in many ways the collective's muse) described as a "New Consciousness," a new race of cosmic inclusivity made up of mestizas - mutable hybrid progenies with "a rich gene pool," the result of "racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollinization." This was to constitute the new "consciousness of the Borderlands," and feminists would be its vanguard. But Anzaldúa warned that this ideal would be hugely difficult to attain, confronting the mestiza with "an inner war," "a struggle of borders," "a cultural collision…" (1998)

What stands out is Berelowitz’s conceptual analysis of Anzaldúa’s warning and reality check that attaining this “cosmic inclusivity” of the “cultural and biological cross pollinization” would not be easy, in the face of the Mestiza “inner war” or struggle of borders.”

In the mid 90s, with the making of laws that targeted immigration specifically, art began crossing the border at a higher rate. This was a critical turning point in border art history, especially when 1994 saw the implementation of legislation such as the Immigration Reform Act and “English only” in public schools.

Michael Dear and Gustavo Leclerc introduce the idea of “(post)border art” as an alternative to border art, “…a new cultural aesthetic being created in the in-between spaces, and manufactured from the archaeologies of past and emerging identities…concerned with the production of hybridities in the liminal interstitial boundaries between political ideologies” (Dear & Leclerc, 2003, p. 14). Similarly, Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarno said that border art “…attempted to expose, or even to celebrate, the political and economic contradictions of the border that sustain the officially illegal, but unofficially sanctioned, market in undocumented workers from Mexico” (Yarbro-Bejarno, 2006, p. 83). From these practices sprung the idea of the (post)border, the theory that the border as a limit is a figment of our imaginations which manifests itself into a series of social conformation behaviors. Institutions and lawmakers that took race, power, and privilege for granted were increasingly under artists’ scrutiny.

BAW/TAF’s experimentation with installation art before the inception of inSITE and its border art sensibility led to a collaboration with inSITE on the “English as a Second Language/Lengua Trabada” piece, which joined three ESL classes together in an effort to

Postborder City’s collaborative authors have made it clear that it is thanks to InSITE’s continuous interventions across the border that Tijuana currently enjoys a much more complex and sophisticated cultural and practice that questions the border, focusing on the postborder reality. In her 2005 article, art critic Jan Tumlir said of inSITE, that the project suggested that the present role of the urban artist was to document urban growth. “More specifically, says Tumlir,” it is a matter of locating, within a rapidly changing topography, those visible marks and signs of human intentionality—whether productive, counterproductive, or openly destructive—that may serve as analogies for aesthetic production” (2005). This interesting idea is in line experiments in contemporary art productions that, at least in theory, give traditionally marginalized people in the border region the agency to view their individual ways of experiencing the border as unique and significant, and intentional. In contrast with the idea that one is the helpless, hopeless victim of his/her condition, and that this condition defines the very life of that individual, inSITE’s reviewers have shown as above, that art has provoked movement in the opposite direction.

Especially in Tijuana, where creativity is such an important mechanism for survival (Iglesias Prieto, 2008), art plays a particularly significant role. Of all border experiences, perhaps the one that requires the most creativity is the experience of crossing. Performances such as Javier Téllez’ “One Flew Over the Void,” in which stuntman David Smith was shot out of a cannon from Mexico to the United States where the border fence reaches into the Pacific Ocean, have spoken directly to this reality. Thousands gathered at the border to watch this performance, a counterpoint to the fence, which is typically viewed as symbol of fear and mistrust in the United States and Mexico. One recording of reactions in response to witnessing the piece is from famous Mexican Actor Gael Garcia Bernal, “Tijuana is the Armpit of Latin America.” (Montezemolo et al., 2006, p. 192). In Emergencias, Volume 1, Iglesias Prieto (2008) recognized Georg Schöllhammer for the phrase “cultural transparency,” distinguishing between a culturally homogeneous and heterogeneous transparency:

Tijuana’s heterogeneous community that constructs and re-constructs itself constantly in the temporary or permanent fact of “living the city” and not “in the city.” In this way the time of residence or antiquity does not conger less or greater
value to people. The idea of cultural transparency” is felt in Tijuana not because its’ a homogeneous society, but because its inhabitants—despite the notable differences and the evident power relations—clearly and explicitly share the intention of searching for social ascension and a “better life.” (p. 49)

Elliot Spagat’s (2005) article reports Téllez’ interpretation of the project: "David Smith is a metaphor for flying over human borders, flying over the law, flying over everything that is established.”

In the last decade, the city has seen a huge growth in the numbers of artists, art institutions and collections and exhibitions of art in the direction of the highlighting its global importance, without necessarily travelling abroad. Analyses of border artists and their work have also increased greatly. The idea of what art can achieve has expanded.

In Postborder City, Palumbio-Liu asserts:

Making art is one way of appropriating the semiotics of the Border and resignifying them., of expanding the possibilities of signification of outside their “official” purpose and thereby pointing as well to the human effects such actions cannot anticipate. (As cited in Dear & Leclerc, 2003, p. 250)

Expanding the possibilities of the semiotics of the border and resignifying them beyond what is officially recognized, is also a way that art emphasizes the individual human experience. Yúdice (2001) asked: What does it mean to be concerned about daily life in the city as a political experience? How does that shape one’s sense of self, community, politics, and aesthetics in the sense of providing the necessary terms for creating of a temporary public domain? A heuristic method has traditionally been defined as one that is used to rapidly come to a solution that is hoped to be close to the best possible answer, or 'optimal solution.' Yúdice (2001), using his multiple subjectivities as linguist, New Yorkino, and cultural anthropologist to find an alternative significance to heuristic practices. His subject of analysis is inSITE, and his viewpoint is that public art practices like this do not engage communities alone as they take place in daily “activities usually attributed to other fields: education, community action, urban development, etc.”

We understand, moreover, that such practices are not limited to the artistic arena, which is institutionally bound, and can be found in activities usually attributed to other fields: education, community action, urban development, etc. In other words, the extraordinary to which we refer is not at odds with the ordinary, and may in fact ensue from it in the very heuristic that a given practice generates. The heuristic as we understand it, is not something which puts itself at the service of a practice (e.g., a method which an art practice assumes); it is rather a dimension inherent in that practice, just as the epistemic, the aesthetic or the ethical are also
dimensions of any art work. None of these dimensions can be separated out for they are inherent in the structure of the practice. (Yúdice, 2001)

The extraordinary is not at odds with the ordinary means that there is a fine line between art and the rest of life, which includes that which is not institutionally bound. What is critical to understand here is that without the community, there would be no art, and without art, many of the community members would lack a great recourse for truthful expression of their lived experiences.

As Bulbo’s (2008) *Tijuaneados Anonimos* project revealed through a series of testimonies in a staged 12-step program by local *Tijuanenses*, crisis is embedded in the very experience of being from Tijuana, being subject to its unenforced or over-enforced laws, the feeling of being overlooked and worn down by the fast paced culture, of not really ever feeling at home in a place that is a temporary home to so many from different walks of life. In his article “Tijuana burns” Carl Luna (2009) criticizes the general public in San Diego for its lack of interest for what is going on just south of its border. He highlights the underlying xenophobia in a general North American tendency to write off problems “from those people,” denying the proven political, social, and economic relevance and inseparability San Diego and Tijuana share. Refusing to learn about, much less, to do anything about the critical crises in Tijuana, many north of the border justify this lack of willingness to show some responsibility by implying that crisis in somehow culturally inherent and inevitable in Mexico. Luna (2009) alludes to the famous San Diego NFL team as an example of the types of things that take priority over the well being of Tijuana residents, to make his point:

> Whether the Chargers move to Chula Vista or not is of far smaller consequence to the San Diego region than is whether Tijuana is going to hell or not. Meanwhile, headlines about violence in northern Baja [are] greeted in the media and by the public with a “What do you expect from those people” reaction rather than a “My God, what can be done to help things down there?” (2009)

Notwithstanding, many who call or once called the city home, express deep pride and nostalgia for its rich cultural mix and unique constant state of flux. Norma Iglesias Prieto (2008), a Tijuana resident for 30-plus years herself, testified in *Emergencias*, that deliberate acts that bring about feelings of agency and deliberation, namely, public art practices in the contemporary glo-cal context of Tijuana/San Diego. Art, Iglesias Prieto (2008), says, “nos salva”:
…porque vivimos momentos de grandes carencias, de desesperanza, de violencia intensa y agresión, de desastres ambientales, de crisis financieras, así como de agotamiento y esterilidad de las fuerzas políticas tradicionales. Al mismo tiempo se experimentan prácticas de consumo desmedido que se viven como actos que dan sentido a la existencia, y la vida se presenta y representa como espectáculo.

(p. 10)

Iglesias Prieto’s attestation to the immeasurable experienced or lived consumption practices in the hopeless violent, and intense context of the border that give meaning to existence, is an emotional appeal to make transparent Tijuana’s need for survival. At the same time, she says, the metropolis people’s quest for a practice to break through the crises and find a sense of cohesive importance drives them to mass consumption. As Yúdice, Schlöhammer, and Sánchez would agree, these informal actors play a central role in redefining the economic “culture” of the border glo-cal. “And life presents and represents itself as a show” in the same mass produced manner. Leah Ollman’s 2009 “Inventing Tijuana” article stated: “An ever-expanding cultural laboratory that thrives on unpredictability, Tijuana exudes raw energy. This hybrid vigor is on ample display in a current survey of art and design from the area” (Ollman, 2009) revealing numbers of just how intensely entangled in crisis the city is, and how this has been imprinted into the city’s art. A particular artist who has emerged from within this dynamic movement, and who has received special attention and recognition from the launching of his public art career with inSITE is Marcos Ramírez ERRE.

4.4 Roots and Artistic Positioning

April 2010, ERRE appeared in the Selections from the 2010 Benefit Art Auction on at MCASD La Jolla, and is the San Diego New Children’s Museum’s Artist of the Year. Having released work in at least a hundred exhibitions to date, ERRE’s velocity and skill set has been very appropriate for his rapidly geo-morphing glo-cal context.

However, ERRE started off his professional trajectory in a very different direction. Following in his father’s footsteps, he went to law school with the plan of continuing the family’s legacy of a tight circle of chief Baja Californian policy makers and attorneys. Coming from a long line of lawyers in his lineage that form corrupt circle who took gains at the expense others in México, Ramírez made the conscious decision to make his living otherwise. Ramírez intended to imagine the law to work for the people, in a way that would contribute to society in a positive way. Nevertheless, his father’s disapproval and his removal
from the Mexican bar meant he was left to fend for himself. Young Marcos would have very few opportunities in the Mexican workforce, and he knew it. With this in mind, he immigrated without documents to the United States. Ramírez worked as a carpenter in order to generate a living for close to two decades, achieving level of mastery that earned him a lot of respect in his field. After his 20-year carpentry career in the United States, Ramírez decided to try his hand at art, and began painting, but that didn’t last long as he didn’t care much for the idea of having his media limited to paint and surface. Not to mention, ERRE blatantly says he’s “bad” at painting (Ramírez ERRE, 2006). In 1994, shortly after discovering that he didn’t have much talent for painting, ERRE’s inner artist turned around and made peace with his inner carpenter and a new possibility was born.

The outcome was ERRE’s debut with inSITE94, one of the biggest transnational art movements in history—and certainly the largest binational until its time. This was also arguably ERRE’s first appearance as an artist. For the first time, he experienced the practice of installation: public art free from the confines of a gallery with his groundbreaking piece, *Century 21*. Due to his knowledge and background in carpentry, architectonic installation art provided an ideal niche for Marcos to launch his intended career. His introduction to this niche was epic. In ERRE, the polygamous marriage of *Tijuanense to transborder* to once undocumented to traveler to carpenter to lawyer to artist (translating carpenter into installations with specific intentions to investigate and deconstruct key legislation) would lead to the birth of a child with multiple personalities. Logically this child will be the product of ERRE’s labor of love, for the love of installing art with purpose.

As the beginning of what would one day be a globally recognized art career, ERRE was so fresh in his representation of a *Cartolandia* house, a typical house of the former slum neighborhood where Centro de Cultural de Tijuana, CECUT by its initials and Tijuana’s

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21 Essentially, installation/environmental art takes into account the viewer’s entire sensory experience, rather than floating framed points of focus on a “neutral” wall or displaying isolated objects (literally) on a pedestal. This leaves space and time as its only dimensional constants. This implies dissolution of the line between art and life; Kaprow noted that “if we bypass ‘art’ and take nature itself as a model or point of departure, we may be able to devise a different kind of art... out of the sensory stuff of ordinary life” (Kaprow, 1993, p. 12).
Zona Centro stand today. A commercial on Mexican TV for the Hipodromo, which Iglesias Prieto (2008) cites in Emergencias as a key determining factor for the restructuring of Tijuana, shows each of the main American corporations that hold stores at el hipodromo as an armed conquistador, invading transborder consumption practices. Perhaps ERRE did not fully understand the gravity of the impression he would leave when he built the “Century 21” house. It stood right on the physical CECUT Plaza, stealing its electricity from the very Institution Ramírez was intervening and altering. This type of juxtapositional construction added a new dynamic to the way we are able to view and question the border space, and how we each adapt to it, live it and experience it. ERRE’s attention to detail is evident in his nearly flawless giant-scale sculptures, thereby making it so the work can hardly be critiqued on merit alone. The undeniable political nature of Ramírez’ work highlights his role as an advocate for social change.

Ramírez ERRE’s eloquent, diversiform practice testifies to the enduring role of the activist artist. In his sculptures, installations, videos, and drawings, he translates complex questions into dynamic visual experiences that seize the public’s imagination. (United States Artist, 2007)

As ERRE’s art evolved, it grew increasingly in the direction of discourse about humanity, and the different ways in which to express individuality, still not letting go of the thought that at the very core of us, we all want the same things—fulfillment, a sense of purpose, happiness, etc...Norma Iglesias Prieto, David Palumbio-Liu Jo-Anne Berelowitz, and Antonio Prieto would agree that the role of the artists as an agent for social change, as an interventionist, as a community leader, or political commentator only expanded from this point on, arguably due in large part, to Ramírez’ work.

TRANSactions quotes Lorenza Munoz’s (2000) interview with the As an artist working on both sides of the border, Marcos Ramírez ERRE speaks of his work in terms of “cultural frontiers,’ using local issues to convey concerns that are global in scope. “I may speak of local issues, but they are universal issues. The work I make has to do with cultural frontiers” (p.102).

ERRE’s work is about social and political behavior, about humans, their environments and their relationships with their boundary spaces, specifically when these spaces overlap. His work then is about the frictions produced by people's interactions. It is work that does critique, but most of the time does it by asking a question, that supports the possible coexistence of more than one truth and struggles against absolutes and blind postures. (MCASD, 2006b, p. 206)
Work that “critiques by asking a question that supports the possible coexistence of more than one truth and struggles against absolutes and blind postures” is questioning the very physical existence of boundaries or impositions on personal freedoms.

In the first volume of her 3-volume series, Emergencias, she highlights the great need for an adequate or acceptable lifestyle in the asymmetrical urban Tijuana/San Diego and outlines the way that art steps in to bring this about (Iglesias Prieto, 2008). Iglesias Prieto (2008) explains that artistic practices are an appropriate mechanism, or a tool, for attaining this balance, this sense of well-being and truth in life; where such expression of human life are necessary —maybe even to the point of this expression’s importance to human survival.

I see the relevance of this in Century 21, in which Marcos puts the three parts of himself together, in his own words, the Lawyer/Carpenter/Artist that are inherent in him and that he cannot separate from one another. If I apply the Lefebvrian analytical model of the three dimensions of reality: the spatial, the perceived, and the lived—to my subject of analysis, ERRE, I see how the carpenter is a space interventionist, the lawyer is a questioner, and the artist is an experiencer or a feeler. Artistically manipulating, questioning, and experiencing the México-US border and many other social constructions such as gender, race, war, institutional organization, Ramírez becomes an important marker in history, where art as a political statement that fights power continues to grow. This point becomes apparent if we take a closer look at his pieces in the trajectory of his career, as he went from increasingly local to global, and responded to the institutional injustices to which he was witness in his homeland.

ERRE’s life path and trajectory of work have spoken directly to/about the transborder condition and experience. Because he and his work have received so much attention from the public and press, and his glo-cal work is so well-exposed, he makes for a comprehensive and interesting case study of an exemplar Tijuanense/”border artist” who has shown contextualized the transborder condition/experience and “naturalized” it into the big picture of the globe. By repositioning from lawyer to carpenter to artist, ERRE resubjectifies his identity and therefore reveals that art can be accessible to everyday human beings—in other words—the innate and universal power to create cannot be given or taken away. Nor does it discriminate against institutional identity markers established by the state. This power, used in collective ways can be used as an effective and culturally appropriate tool for
challenging traditional dynamics of power and control and naturalizing states of otherness or difference.

"Since everyone is dumping on Mexico these days, you might as well help me do the real thing."

My friend Marcos Ramírez (aka ERRE) isn't kidding. He's building a new house in Colonia Libertad, Tijuana's oldest and most surreally colorful neighborhood, and needs to dispose of some construction debris. I ride shotgun in his pickup while his younger brother Omar, a poet-artist with eyes like Che Guevara's, sprawls in the backseat.

The old city dump is closed, the new one too far away, so like most Tijuaneses, ERRE uses the services of the informal economy. Moreover, in the midst of an unprecedented NAFTA recession, a horror-ridden narco-war and now a much-hyped pandemic, any act that circulates a few pesos among "el pueblo" seems conscientious. (Davis, 2003)

As Davis points out, The ever emergent ERRE surprisingly and refreshingly unafraid to dig up and reassert the task of speaking directly to politicians and their actions, introduced yet another way of looking at the border, which focused largely on his hometown, Tijuana. In a 2008 Reuter’s interview, he said, "I make art to balance out all the evil....Many people can't handle Tijuana. I'm fascinated by it, but I'm crazy" (Rosenberg, 2008). Ramírez’ seemingly simplistic dialogue actually delivers a message of honesty and self exposure as a local revealing him/herself as just as “crazy” as Tijuana, in a sense, owning up to the fact that Tijuana is only a sum of all its parts-its people (Bulbo, 2008).

This thought, which naturalizes the Tijuana factor of the transborder condition by showing that it’s okay to be from Tijuana, becomes especially important in the light of the current mistrust in elected officials and the fact that Tijuanenses don’t really expect to see any positive results come out of their government’s actions, because the general consensus is that elected officials don’t care about the people. Furthermore, ERRE’s ownership of Tijuana and passion for the urban phenomenon always seems to shine through—the ethos he evokes with his statement: “I’m fascinated by [Tijuana], but I’m crazy” (Rosenberg, 2008). In other words, he is inevitably and naturally intrigued by it, to the point that he gives in to the emotion. It evokes a feeling that paints an image of ERRE shrugging, “Call me crazy, but I’m right where I need to be.” Last year, Emily Morrison and Lori Salmon wrote

Marcos Ramírez ERRE works in a constantly evolving lexicon of formats and media to explore the role of history, communication, economics, and militarism in
the development of cultural stereotypes, and those stereotypes’ subsequent role in border control policies and conflicts. (e-flux, 2008)

Kate Bonansinga (2008b) holds that what sets ERRE apart from the camp of traditional Mexican political art is that he has a double persona:

He is in the privileged position of being both an outsider (as a citizen of Mexico) and an insider (since he spends almost as much time in the US as he does in his home country). From this position—and in the age of globalization—Ramírez is critical of US activities abroad, not just in the Border region; disdain for what he sees as the abuse of power is poignantly expressed in his work. (Bonansinga, 2008b)
CHAPTER 5

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 CENTURY 21: CREATIVE STRATEGIES FOR REMEMBERING AND FOR INVADING THE URBAN LANDSCAPE

Figures 5.1 and 5.2 show ERRE’s debut installation with inSITE94 and the Century 21© logo respectively. These two images in visual comparison make for an interesting dialogue; one is organizing the white, black and yellow into a neat geometrical sign for marketing purposes, while the other is a practically constructed 3-D living space wearing its color: a yellow garbage can, a black T-shirt, and a white wall.

Figure 5.1. This photograph of Century 21 was taken at the launching of inSite 94, in CECUT plaza. 1994, installation, size of original work: 40’x 40’x 12.
With the release of inSITE, the largest binational art movement in history, the artistic landscape of the border region changed drastically and would eventually reflect itself on the physical space of the borderlands. In 1994, Ramírez debuted with inSITE and his first installation, the inviting, ironic, challenging, invasive, controversial, provocative, confrontational, undeniable, allusive and highly interactive Century 21. Most would actually consider this ERRE’s first appearance as an artist.

I depart by painting an image of the piece with an initial description of physical characteristics, moving on to engage in a deeper analysis on this first Lefebvrian spatial plane, the Physical, as I call it. I continue to explore Century 21 on Lefebvre’s conceptual and experiential levels and ultimately speak to how it re-presents the transborder experience at the center of the physical borderlands space.

Aesthetically built closely modeling the shanty-style shacks in classic Tijuana colonias, Century 21 was “a replica of a typical, provisional dwelling found in the poor communities that comprise Tijuana’s outskirts” (Bonansinga, 2008a). Historically contextualizing his piece, ERRE used wood, tires, barbed wire, sand, and other recycled materials that mimicked those of the Cartolandia<sup>22</sup> houses that were destroyed when a dam was opened in order to “relieve” the government-commissioned Tijuana River Canal. Thousands of residents were killed. Simply put, the Tijuana River Canal builders wanted to

<sup>22</sup> *Cardboard neighborhood* in Spanish
remedy the architectural “problem” standing in the way of “modernization” of Tijuana. Rene Peralta tells the story in his 2005 Worldview article entitled “Illicit Acts of Urbanism”:

Displacement of people from this area became a twenty-year endeavor, ending in violence and destruction in 1979. The heavy rains falling upon the city at the time caused the Rodriguez Dam to accumulate a large reserve that, according to state officials, needed to be released; without notice, the Dam was opened and water swept away the cardboard shacks.

Brutally demolished by an unnatural disaster, Cartolandia is an undeniable reminder of Tijuana’s historical spatial effects that spill over geopolitical borders as much as they are a result of its proximity to and conditioning by this border.

Century 21’s response to Tijuana’s historical landscape was so highly original and innovative that it achieved abundant reach and recognition internationally. To mention one, Kate Bonansinga’s (2008b) article said: “Marcos Ramírez ‘ERRE’ juxtapose[d] the monumentality and permanence of Mexico’s institutional architecture with the temporality and flexibility of semi nomadic residential structures.” The decision to place Century 21 in CECUT’s (Centro Cultural de Tijuana) Plaza in a highly visible and central space at the heart of the modern metropolis and in the middle of Tijuana’s elite art scene, restored the Cartolandia that used to exist before the architectural transformation of the space. Century 21’s “tectonic confrontationalism” (Peralta, 2008) was so in your face—a slum shack planted dead in CECUT’s way, as a reminder of how many Cartolandia houses had to be flooded and how many people had to die in order for Tijuana’s bustling Zona Centro to come to be.

Reflecting ERRE’s vision, Century 21 showed international visitors of CECUT the reality of asymmetrical juxtaposition in Tijuanense city planning and architecture, which has been recognized internationally. In this video documentary, ERRE points to a beautiful house he had built at 27 in an area without pavement. People called it “the flower in the swamp.” Marcos drew upon this concept to develop the ideological basis for Century 21.

Experimenting with spatial juxtaposition, ERRE said, “[Now] I’m gonna do the opposite. I’m gonna bring a house from the really poor neighborhoods and put it in the museum and that will be like a really awful house in the place that’s supposed to be the most developed”
(United States Artists, 2007). The piece’s subtitle, *the Front*, underpins its spatial questioning of the part of Tijuana that runs away from the reality of the Border opens a discursive door that can never be closed.

Altering the artistic context of his time with the making of *Century 21*, ERRE stepped into a new realm of installation art making, paving the way for local and international artists to do the same. He actually changed the very face of inSITE with his integration into the project. German artist, Krzysztof Wodiczko, later produced a video installation piece for inSITE that launched in 2001, where he recorded domestic worker women telling their atrocious narratives of sexual abuse on the job, and projected them onto *la bola* de Centro Cultural de Tijuana at nighttime. Projects like these would not only alter the space of the Mexico-US border region, but in essence, the “reality” of it vis-à-vis the rest of the world, and engage the local communities in practices that better their way of life and raise consciousness about critical human rights violations they face daily. All the while, the demand for this cooperation, the collaborators, and the funding is called for and created by the inception of the project. The way this border is historicized is now substantially marked by artistic production.

To place the piece within its historical context, *Century 21* was erected shortly after NAFTA was passed, and after architectural restructuring of Tijuana’s Zona Río, and more importantly, after one of the notorious floods that wiped out thousands of *Cartolandia* dwellings, as a direct result of the construction and opening of Tijuana River dam to clear out a huge area for building.

Societal unrest and political action on the part of the *Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional* and Subcomandante Marcos stood up against the marginalization and negligence of indigenous people—and with good reason. Livelihoods of those living off and using from the

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23 2007 USA Fellows video interview site: http://usa.feedroom.com/

24 “Constructed on a 35,445 square meter estate and designed by the renowned Mexican architects Pedro Ramírez Vázquez and Manuel Rosen Morrison, the Tijuana Cultural Center (CECUT) was nearly instantly incorporated to the city’s landscape, as it simultaneously became one of its landmarks. Situated in the heart of Tijuana’s most modern zone, due to the emblematic sphere like form of the Imax Theatre building, the CECUT is popularly known as La Bola (The Ball).
land were being taken away by corporate interests such as drug companies’ patents on indígenas’ ancient medicinal plants, making it now a crime to pick these particular species for common use. Fox and Bush were both elected into office and neither one of them seemed to meet the needs of greater honesty and transparency in government for which government many were hoping, and therefore the trust of the people. Questionable practices and back-door relationships of those in power have raised doubts in people’s minds about the urgency to create a more just system with the people’s interests in mind.

ERRE was purposeful in conceiving Century 21. Questioning and affecting the concept of the Tijuana San Diego Borderlands, ERRE literally reversed the history of the flood for the case of one home, restoring it back into existence. He placed a Cartolandia house, a Tijuanense dwelling made of recycled materials (all wiped out by the 1993 flood), back onto its original ground, using the same industrial and commercial byproducts used by the original Cartolandia squatters, and powering it up the original way through stolen electricity. But who was Marcos stealing from and why? This time, the electricity was taken from CECUT, the very institution of creativity that houses artistic practices like Century 21, practices that challenge power and control. CECUT literally stands where creativity once served as a mechanism for survival, itself becoming an ironic iconic reminder of the violent erasure of the former heart of Tijuana. Century 21 seems to ask the question: how did the history and concept of this space change abruptly, unnaturally, and forcedly with the opening of the dam in January 1993? It would seem that the city planning effort serves to wipe the city slate clean and institutionalize everything, including creativity.

The aesthetic manifestation of Century 21 in the new Tijuana metropolis was so strangely real that it blended the line between art and life. Perhaps an intent to re-conceptualize the spaces of the city, this fully functional house was so accessible that the public could enter and watch TV, eat, sit and rest. It had working electricity and running water that it almost encouraged you to use, making the piece highly experiential and thus engaging you in a dialogue with the experience of living in a squatter shack and doing whatever it takes to survive amongst and against the monstrous mass of institutionalism generated by neo-globalism. Furniture, clothesline, ladder, etc, seasoned the piece with the spirit of Cartolandia, haunting the current landscape of Tijuana’s center as people enter and exit its spaces. Century 21 placed ERRE’s own border into the illusion of reality that “New
Tijuana” has indicated. Others have attested to Century 21’s aesthetic and conceptual effects. One appropriation by Rene Peralta was that: “In front of CECUT, it brought up the way in which institutions of culture hide violent history with a civilized wagon in architectonic form” (Peralta, 2008). Bonansinga (2008b) said in the same article quoted previously that, ERRE “brought the economic periphery of the border to center stage.” In a way, this shows how the spatial and conceptual come together in the piece, making it monumentally meaningful and complex in the realm of analyzing our spaces and questioning borders.

Peralta (2008) reached the conclusion that:

*Century 21 intended to de-contextualize both structures by making apparent and visible the formal and tempo-spatial tension inherent in the large context of the city and realizing that the concept of border is illustrative of the inherent antagonism that haunts not only the US/Mexico region but is prevalent within the local urban space of the city of Tijuana.*

As Peralta (2008) points out, ERRE’s critical representation, or “concept of the border” paints a broader portrait of the Mexico-US border, than its geopolitical limitations authorize. Therefore, Ramírez is able to “de-contextualize” or confuse the context of two contrasting tempo-spatial realities of Tijuana. The “tempo-spatial tension” Peralta (2008) alludes to has flavors of Lefebvre and other postmodern spatial analysts, but perhaps Lefebvre and Peralta could be demystified, using more practical terms.

Switching now to the reflexive subject, I’ve personally experienced that everyday life, for example, in a typical Californian urban space seems to be defined by an illogical “tempo-spatial tension” created by the system that demands that you be on time for your many appointments, while impeding your free movement through a series of urban constructions (such as borders, traffic lights, freeway congestion, bridges, construction, speed limits, etc…) you had better get the kids to bed on time because if you’re late for work your boss will yell or you could get fired. If you don’t give your young child the attention s/he needs, s/he will cry all night and possibly even grow a complex about himself and others. If you can’t stay late, you’re probably going to get talked to about what it means to be a “team player.” On the other hand your priority is naturally to pick your child up from care at a decent hour. After all, if you don’t look after her, then who will? What I have drawn from all this as have many others before me, is that things are not as they seem when it comes to the idea of “freedom.” Our choices of life are quite limited and trivial if we restrict ourselves to
buying a package, so to speak, from the greater machine that is the new global corporate industrial system.

Within the same realm of this irony, *Century 21’s* title alludes to the multibillion dollar realty company, who surely wouldn’t be caught dead selling a house like ERRE’s. Millions of disillusioned Americans stuck in the middle of the 21st century real estate tragedy that has robbed them of their homes would agree the term bears a reference to the “monopoly man,” from whom you buy all your property, and to whom you pay all your financial worth. With the economic and real estate recession of Bush and Obama administrations, “the man” is highly pertinent today. In the case of Ramírez’s piece and in the context of Tijuana’s Zona Centro, *Century 21* becomes a lie, a joke—in the face of thousands who lost their lives for the building of what stands there today. The logical truth is that *Cartolandia* will never happen again. After all, *Century 21*, though it is technically congruent to a *Cartolandia* house, is not a *Cartolandia* house, and it surely is not a house in its original context because that would be tempo-spatially impossible. The moment of that experience of the critical drive for survival is gone at once and the demolishment of *Cartolandia*, like the mass destruction of the ancient Amazon ecosystem. It’s enraging to me that this kind of violent change feels irreversible. Recovering its spirit, however, is not impossible and in fact can be done in an instant in a thought or a memory of its resilience and its sacrifice, or even just a day in the life. Shifting back to Lefebvre, it is precisely here, that the individual human narrative and the power of the emotive, memory or the recollection of past experiences come into play.

ERRE was able to reconcile his inner elements through artistic production by expressing his own condition as a subject of perceived and conceived urban spaces, while displaying the “antagonism that haunts” the border and his home Tijuana. Not to mention, reveling and questioning the absurdity of the realities that restrict our human movement, and a perfect example of what happens when we look through the lens of the other and see the limitations this neo-global boom has meant for development in the south borderlands. In the spirit of widening the looking glass, ERRE is recuperating voices from the silence by creating a resting space for the spirits of *Cartolandia*.

It seems only logical to conclude that the reality we live is a combination of the physical and ideological limits by which we all abide, and has only as much potential for
greatness as the degree to which we allow our imaginations construct alternative perceptions of reality.

Looking at ERRE’s meta narrative as a *transborder* subject, and at his trajectory as an artist, it’s important to note that he had immigrated illegally to the US about 11 years before the production of his first installation *Century 21* and until 1998, worked in construction in San Diego, Orange County, and Los Angeles. “I was trying to forget that I was once a lawyer and I was concentrating on being a carpenter—a blue collar worker—in the United States,” said ERRE in a 2007 interview for his Gund fellowship. “But then suddenly, art appeared. That was when I was able to put together the three parts of my personality that really make who I am right now.” (United States Artist, 2007)

ERRE said of *Century 21*: “I wanted to confront poverty at the center of the city” (Ramírez ERRE, 2006). If we apply Lefebvre’s three levels of space in order to deconstruct this quotation by ERRE re *Century 21*, “At the center of the city” represents the spatial/physical level, because it is stating the site of confrontation of intervention where the piece is installed. “To confront poverty” represents a questioning on a logical or conceptual basis because it identifies ERRE’s understanding of a poverty-stricken borderlands as a result of socioeconomic marginalization. Marcos’ observation and his project on poverty and the city may seem to be natural conclusions of a given condition, but be assured that these elements of movement are purposeful and carefully planned. ERRE is communicating his express intent to make the agents of poverty on the outskirts of cities stand down and let the people live in peace with each other celebrating the agency to make a better situation for *el pueblo* through practices of equality. This specificity in message could make *Century 21* even more important to note than previously thought. From these perceptions, ERRE develops, or conceives critiques of social phenomena and injustice. “Wanted to confront poverty” states ERRE’S emotional motive or free intention for doing the piece, in other words, “I can because I am mentally freeing myself through this act of agency.” A statement as bold and simple as “I wanted to confront poverty at the center of the city” is so unmistakably direct that the only question left is why did ERRE want to confront poverty at the center of the city—what’s the motive? We could call this driving force passion as it were, the passion ERRE felt when he built *Century 21* and as he continues to build, each time finding himself more present in his own art practice. More importantly, *Century 21* is the
ultimate testament to just what types of representational spaces must be constructed in order to respond appropriately to the absurdity of much of our built environment, and the role that human agency and innovation play in this response mechanism. There is, in all this theory, a notable experience of survival from which many *Estado-Unidenses* are alienated by lack of demand. ERRE commented on his thought process in a public discussion about difference and art that:

> If you are raised in a Gringo house, you’re going to grow up to build a house like that—like the one you've always seen growing up. And if you come to Tijuana and you see a *chingo* of things, the house of any shape of any material of any color..... and that you will give more freedom to choose more creative materials (Ramírez ERRE, 2006).

Here ERRE is highlighting and bringing to the forefront through art, an advantage that may not be clear from a typical northern perspective of what Norma Iglesias-Prieto (2008) calls the *transborder* “condition of meaning.” Thus, he questions identity through experience or the emotive as Lefebvre named it.

In all, how does what we see and know vis-à-vis the border get manipulated by *Century 21*, and what are the inherent global critiques even beyond the spatial categorizations laid out by Lefebvre, that emphasize the power of the human spirit to rebel against spatial injustice and rethink/reconfigure the Tijuana/San Diego Border space? A house with the essence of *Cartolandia*, constituted of material waste manufactured on distant points of the globe, and resurrected in front of CECUT. Global, indeed. Perhaps even universal, *Century 21* gave us a time machine into our own histories to explore and unveil the everyday presence of tensions of the past. It would be difficult to match this level of discursive significance in another artistic production but ERRE had apparently made a firm vow to continue questioning what he knew about his context full of borders—real and imagined. In line with the artistic contextual direction of 1990’s Tijuana, This tireless questioning lead to a growing sophistication in material as well as a growth in terms of number of reviews of his work throughout the rest of his first decade and a half as an artist.

### 5.2 TOY-AN HORSE

Figure 5.3 is ERRE’s second highly-reviewed and ground-breaking piece, Toy an Horse (1997), shown in its installation point between Mexico and the United states.
Immediately following is Figure 5.4, a drawing of Iliad’s mythical Trojan Horse upon which Ramírez’ representational allusion is based.

Artistically contextualized within inSITE97’s binational exhibition, ERRE installed the famous Toy an Horse on the border at the San Ysidro port of entry. Kate Bonansinga (2008a) wrote a review art as opinion in which she observes its physical aesthetic:

For inSITE 1997, Ramírez built Toy an Horse directly on the border at the heavily trafficked San Ysidro crossing between San Diego and Tijuana. The artist modeled this gigantic wooden structure after homer’s description of the Trojan horse in the Iliad, down to its capacity of thirty people. One head faced Mexico, the other the US. (Bonansinga, 2008a)

Interestingly, Toy an Horse simultaneously faced in opposite directions: one head looked south to Mexico, and the other to its northern hegemon, the United States. ERRE talks about the construction process in a 2009 interview with the San Diego New Children’s Museum, where the piece was relocated and reassembled that year: “The original was built with house construction techniques…the easiest part of this installation is the construction. It just took time to make it” (Ramírez ERRE, 2009). Toy an Horse, of which Marcos displayed a small replica in Spain, was a two-headed forty-foot tall Trojan Horse meant to allude to the horse the Greeks used to defeat the Trojans in the Iliad, physically imposed itself on the border in a
way that was undeniable and inevitable for border crossers to encounter. *Toy an Horse* was made of wood, a material that is natural, both by definition, because it is a naturally occurring substance, and to ERRE, who is so familiar with the material because of his years of experience in carpentry. Homer’s original Trojan Horse was also made of wood and had wheels like ERRE’s, but diverged from the two-headed *Toy an Horse* in that it was conciliatory and deceiving. ERRE detonated the past in a modern re-construction and physically deconstructed the Trojan Horse into *Toy an Horse* by stripping it of its skin and revealing Homer’s trap door in the horse’s belly—even adding a ladder to make entrance and exit through the door completely unproblematic. The flexible and interwoven bend of softened wooden panels speak to the resilience and adaptability of artistic questioning and the diverse possibilities of transborder experiences. Somewhat resembling the skeletal structure of a majestically invasive Viking ship without its top layer, *Toy an Horse* stood tall and strong despite its unfinished nature. Two conclusions could be drawn from this interpretation. The piece could be interpreted as a critique on the tendency of ends justifying means in the current neo-global Border context (e.g. leaving regional development
unfinished against political promises), or getting a job done without being mindful of the secondary or “unintended consequences” on the lives of others.

To recap, *Toy an Horse*, erected in 1997 on the very border line itself at the San Ysidro port of entry, raised questions about assumptions that the invasion occurring between Mexico and the United States takes place unilaterally. Never a more literal invasion of space, *Toy an Horse* was additionally important because anyone who crossed the border had no choice but to look at it and think about what art was trying to express.

To place the piece within the contemporary context of inSITE as it had unfolded until that point, I draw from Garcia Canclini (1997), who published a piece in *Intromisiones Compartidas* entitled *A Reimagined Public Art on the Border* that contends there are Three main Misunderstandings about inSITE’s historical connection to NAFTA, and the cultural make-up of Tijuana in contrast to the rest of Mexico: (1) That Tijuana is a quintessential historically rich town of Mexico, (2) public artists, he urges, must face the bipolar logics of the monumental and of the spectacular, instead opting to take an “orientation [that] empowers them to transcend the pageant of the moment.” In it he writes, citing inSITE’s catalogue:

> inSITE’s organizers themselves acknowledge in the catalog that, since the presentation of inSITE94, events have unfolded in the Tijuana-San Diego region that contradict the unifying purpose of this program: “The passage of Proposition 187 by the voters of California;…the continued calls in the U.S. for militarization of the border.” Faced with such “events that have the tendency to pull us apart, the inSITE project…demonstrates the enormous potential of working together.

Despite the intensification of border conflicts in recent years, the warm reception extended to inSITE97 and its messages suggests that substantial progress has been made in the areas of *cultural* understanding, mutual interest, and the emergence of a more complex image of binational exchange in the media. (Garcia Canclini, 1997, p. 103)

Whether or not this greater degree of success in cooperative cultural practice is a result of the quality of art produced is a question to ponder. More importantly, *transborder subjects* were in the middle of a cultural renaissance, and boundaries were being brought down through artistic practice. ERRE has been called the “heir to the throne” of *transborder* art practices in Tijuana-San Diego. He seems to take the aesthetic for a walk on the wild side of The Experiential.
ERRE employed the physical placement, medium, and structural design of *Toy an Horse* in order to deconstruct and question the border on a spatial or physical level. Intervening the San Ysidro Port of entry with a hollow forty-foot installation made of a natural material poses an interesting physical juxtaposition that confronts the very “reality” of the border as we perceive it.

Perhaps even suggesting that geopolitical borders and law enforcement institutions are among the most constructed and unnatural objects in existence, and therefore they are the most flawed—ERRE looks at the physical invasion of Mexico-US as mutual and constant. So a horse which is planted in the border crossing between Mexico and the United States, a horse who is facing both ways—isn’t able to go anywhere but where the state locks it in—between established spaces with established boundaries. Such boundaries serve as basis for mapping out the physical possibilities of human movement. Questioning this “reality” alludes to “breaking the dialectical relationship” we inherently have with our natural space. The spaces created between the migrants who come to the United States and the families they came to work for and support, are very real, and undeniably a result of the neocapitalist and neoglobal movements which have mapped out our land and borders. Hiding in the belly of the horse, only to be ping-ponged back and forth between the “corrals” of Mexico and the United States (movement largely driven by corporate interests), the people, the workers, border patrol, the narcos, guns, and drugs along with the politicians are taken for granted as part of this constructed space.

Looking into ERRE’s intent behind the piece, one finds that he reflects on the need to “make peace with [the] past” in 2007, reminding us that he feels that he belongs to both sides. “Two different ways of thinking between two countries that never managed to understand each other, but they need to live together forever, because they share a border (Ramírez ERRE, 2009). For this exhibition, says Ramírez, they disassembled it and shipped it to the United States, to put it back together again for NCM.

25 See Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*
Contextually cornerstone to the emergence of new artistic meaning on the border, ERRE’S early work was recognized by others from the *transborder* cultural sphere and the international arts community. inSITE’s International Project Reunion on October 4, 2006 allowed collaborators and community members to join forces in recapping meanings and influences of inSITE. One of the commentaries by Artistic Director and Curator Osvaldo Sánchez highlighted ERRE’s contribution to inSITE_97.

It’s a project at the time when *Interventions* was addressing the practice of site specificity. It was a very effective piece. Located at the Border it created an urban legend in the area. There’s a classical relationship between borders and the fencing and power and transgressing a border. And that piece has become an icon for inSITE even if the practice it incarnates is very specific in terms of how it was conceived. What was mainly a large scale sculpture, that transformed a military place into a global scene of power, had a very powerful political effect in the area and generated a lot of discussions and a lot of thought about border and power and military presence in the American side in that border. (inSITE, 2005)

Sanchez’ recognition of *Toy an Horse*’s “powerful political effect” on the border region and the conversations and analyses it generated “about border and power and military presence in the American side” heeds a closer look at the relationship between these components, but I am more interested in primarily capturing what they mean in the context of the Lefebvrian spatial levels. The “powerful political effect” translates to the representational spaces the piece created for questioning the spaces of representation (border) and spatial practices (power and American military presence).

Historically, exploited cheap labor has driven immigration across Tijuana/San Diego for decades, but this number grew exponentially after NAFTA was signed into law. By Lefebvre, *Toy an Horse* challenges the notion that migrant workers from Mexico may perceive—and rightfully so—physical displacement to the US as their only option to creating a better situation for themselves and the families they leave behind, by showing that a geographic fix is not the answer. It questions asymmetry between lands in the very space that divides identities and imposes the prevalence of nation states to the disadvantage of some and the clear advantage of another. More importantly, ERRE reminded us that the invasion we are experiencing is at least bi-directional. This is limiting our view of the Mexico-US borderlands as a nation-state dyad. Dual invasion means that reality is not the stereotypical view that these people are coming to steal our jobs here in the US. No one wins in a dual invasion, so if we see the current Border reality as such, then something needs to be done to
change the premises and priorities of the current systemic context of south-to-north labor pulls and promises.

Reflecting on *Toy an Horse*, and self appropriating the piece some political thoughts and postulations emerge. Besides the massive amounts of drugs and weapons seized at the border in the context of the current drug war, many other types of transborder exchanges are contributing to the inter-relational reality of Mexico and US at Tijuana/San Diego. Typically goods come in along with labor from south to north. However, greedy capitalist entrepreneurs who are looking for desperate and impoverished people to exploit, continue to grow richer and richer by providing “employment opportunities” in agriculture and factory work in Tijuana and San Diego. These workers, as history has shown, end up committing themselves to lives of brutal work conditions, long hours and years of separation from their families, and still don’t earn decent living wages. It would seem, then, that a large sector of our economic representations of space are based on a highly asymmetrical system of spatial practices and human living standards wherein something as arbitrary as geographic origin determines individual human conditions. Many of us as North Americans, live in a comfortable ignorance to the undeniable truth that the neo-global capitalist system provides this pristine state of unimaginable conveniences at the expense of the other. ERRE’s reality is that: “I live with one foot in the US and one foot in Tijuana” (Ramírez ERRE, 2006). Here, he reminds us that in order to honor the border, he would metaphorically have to cut himself in half, or, that he’s invading himself by crossing from one side to the other.

Authors have both critiqued and celebrated ERRE’s *Toy an Horse* I feel it important to quote a large section of a critique of the piece by David Lewison at Artword.com because in my opinion, the critique itself is the same line of thinking ERRE is critiquing in the production. Lewison (1997) wrote:

That the work straddles the actual line of demarcation between the United States and Mexico is likely to go unnoticed because the physical and psychological barrier which must be passed is a couple of hundred feet to the north, in the form of the Customs and Immigration building. As a result, the work looks as though it’s fully on the Mexican side.

Perhaps attempting to appear even-handed about border matters, Ramírez/ERRE has constructed a two-headed, bi-directional horse. This gesture is misplaced, however, because only the United States perceives itself to be under siege.
The work also suffers from an ailment common to most outdoor art in most locations: it's dwarfed by its surroundings (A fact which is disguised by the positioning of the camera which took this picture).

Lewison may have missed Mike Davis’ (2003) warning that “nativists critics” of ERRE “...are dealing with a consummate magical realist” and that they should beware of becoming “part of the performance” themselves. Davis (2003) noted that ERRE “merely laughed” when he asked the artist what was inside the horse, possibly suggesting that it’s an empty construct:

And where the original Trojan Horse concealed its violent intent, we can easily peer into the belly of ERRE's horse. It's simply wooden slats; no secrets, no deception. ERRE's horse, like the exhibition itself, promotes the movement across the border as a gift offered in both directions. (p. 19)

Davis underlines the transparency of the piece:

It's also possible for the Trojan Horse to be an apt symbol of a show organized solely by the artists' ethnicity. It could be a gift worth celebrating, but the potential exists for a flop that puts artist before art, cultural identity before quality of work. That's certainly not the case here. Drawn from the collections of the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, this is an exhibition packed with emotion and metaphorical resonance; a snapshot of a community of individuals addressing complicated issues - the borders of geography, politics, and culture - in clear and cogent voices. (As cited in Strosnider, 2007)

Norma Iglesias Prieto (2008) tells us that visual arts in Tijuana are altering the three dimensions of the urban space indicated by Henri Lefebvre: the historical, logical, and the emotive. ERRE’s Toy an Horse is the case in point, she says, of art’s capacity for physically invading and the Tijuana-SD Border space, in a real moment in history (Iglesias Prieto, 2008, p. 104). It is logical that art placed on an international border will be more provocative than that placed on a gallery wall, but interestingly enough, this art is so controversial and evolved, that ERRE observes some can’t even see it, or take for granted, as something that “ought to be there.” Stephanie Hanor said:

Updated with double heads and a body formed from strips of wood that prevent the concealment of anything or anyone inside, the construction of the piece allows for full transparency and the prevention of hidden agendas. Rather than pointing the blame at one side of the border or the other, Ramirez’s two-headed horse looks both north and south to raise questions about the mutual exchange and interdependence of the two cultures (As cited by MCASD, 2006b, p. 18).

Hanor shows here the inherent paradoxes in aesthetics of duality.
Switching to the reflexive subject, I look into creative connections between meta-narratives as a purposeful subjective method of analysis. Never having seen the piece myself, (I was a junior in high school when it was erected and didn’t know anything about art at the border.) I often pondered what the title of this piece signifies…so much so that I became a bit obsessive about finding a connection. I had many theories, but none seemed exacting enough to have come from ERRE. I was intrigued to read Heriberto Yepez’s 2007 blog on “Tollan,” the urban and psychic time-space in which spiritual plentitude is reached. Incidentally tollan and Toy an are phonetically one and the same. However, Yepez (2007):

Personalmente resumo la espiritualidad mexicana así: Tollan es Aztlán; Aztlán es Tollan. “Tollan” significa el espacio-tiempo (urbano y psíquico) donde se alcanza la plenitud espiritual; “Aztlán”, el espacio-tiempo útero (urbano y psíquico) que da origen a la geopsique. En esta espiritualidad, cada instante debe convertirse en “Tollan” y conforme el devenir prosigue, cada instante pasado se vuelve “Aztlán”, es decir, etapa superada del camino sagrado. Tollan y Aztlán aluden, sobre todo, a la cartografía de una migración mental. Se tratan de estaciones del viaje interno.

Pulling Lefebvre out of Yepez, in this spirituality each instant should convert to “Tollan” and in agreement with the divine rite each past instant become “Aztlán”, that is, the higher era of sacred road. “Tollan” and “Aztlán”, allude, above all, to the cartography of a mental migration. It is about internal travel stations (Yepez, 2007).

Having read Yepez, I was inspired to come up with some of my own philosophizing around and about the piece. If Toy An and Tollan are just a coincidence and have no link, then this argument would fall apart, but Yepez’s argument unravels to suggest otherwise. For him, Tijuana is the perfect example of the collapse of Tollan, “the urban and psychic time-space in which one reaches spiritual plentitude (above in Spanish)” because it doesn’t know its mother or father city (Yepez, 2007). It is an orphan Urban, as ERRE has also confirmed. Therefore, Yepez (2007) concludes, Tijuana looks to the north and turns its back on Mexico, thereby by definition, having lost its Aztlan, the “uterine time-space (urban and psychic) that gives origin to the geopsychee.”

5.3 Prejudice Project

Figures 5.5, 5.6, 5.7, and 5.8 are respectively ERRE’s Prejudice Project, a photo of migrants being illegally detained by Minutemen, a photo of a Minuteman Border Vigilante standing guard at the border, and Jim Gilchrest, the spokesperson/founder of the Minutemen.
Figure 5.5. Photo of *Prejudice Project.* 2006, installation, size of original work: 14’x 44’.

Figure 5.6. This is a photo of migrants detained by minutemen.
Like *Toy an Horse*, ERRE’s 2006 piece entitled *Prejudice Project* also intervened the Tijuana/San Diego Border aesthetically or physically. This installation, for which writer Mike Davis posed with his back to the camera as a minuteman in camouflage, watching over the border horizon, is a photo montage on a billboard with dimensions 14’x44”.

The words, “DON’T BE A MAN FOR JUST A MINUTE. BE A MAN FOR YOUR WHOLE LIFE.” are printed in bold face type. *Prejudice Project* was placed just before the Tijuana-San Ysidro crossing point on the I-5 freeway intentionally—in order to make you “pick a side,” so to
speak, while crossing the border. Aesthetically, this group of physical characteristics questions the physical Mexico-US border because they make you ask, “What am I looking at?” Apparently, that under question is that the Minutemen have now become a part of the physical reality of the border, another barrier in the way of the crossing and defender of the nation state.

Upon viewing the billboard, which is virtually inevitable if you are driving north on the 5 out of Mexico, it automatically makes a first impression on you. This first impression will have a lot to do with your “permanent” physical placement among other important factors that are reflected in the way you view and conceptualize the border. The media are industrial materials such as steel and commercial paint, and of equal importance is the process of producing this piece. The action of copying the construction process of an actual freeway sign conforms it to a public urban aesthetic that ERRE seemingly re-subjectifies in a potentially infinite number of ways.

ERRE revealed his concept in a public presentation at San Diego State in November 2006:

[Por eso hice el proyecto de los minutemen], porque te pones en una postura igual a la que estas condenando. Entonces como lo que se tiene que lograr es la integración de alguna manera, la feliz convivencia entre dos grupos diferentes que en verdad lo único que hacen es beneficiarse al entrar en contacto, no se perjudican. (Ramírez ERRE, 2006)

Iglesias Prieto (2006) reminds us of the importance and complexity of identity as a factor in and of itself, which is not sum zero. She is actually keeping ERRE honest with his dialogue of “two different groups,” and most importantly bringing the discussion back to the spaces in between the ones and the others. Incorporating the others’ traits does not mean that you lose traits of your own but instead become “enriched” by interfaces with the other.

Iglesias Prieto: --… pero la identidad no es suma cero. Es decir, no porque incorpores un elemento tienes que sacar otro, El disco duro de la identidad tiene mucha capacidad. (...) el ver al otro te hace más crítico de lo que eras originalmente.

SARA: Entonces dirías que la frontera debería de ser una oportunidad más que…
ERRE: ¡Una bendición!
SARA: Una oportunidad de conocerse mejor
ERRE: Una posibilidad de conocerse, de convivir, de compartir, sabes, de manera más elemental una persona se conoce acá…. Al hacer eso uno rinde parte de sí
para aceptar posiciones del otro, pero al mismo tiempo, ese otro, adquiere cosas de ti-lo bueno y lo malo… y así se experimenta la vida,… (Ramírez ERRE, 2006)

Departing here, I reflect once again from a subjective point of view. Prejudice Project asks you: Whom do you support, which side of the border are you looking at and which side are you looking from? What do you see? If being a minuteman means being “a man just for a minute,” then who are the permanent men? Or is the installation praising the Minutemen and glorifying the paramilitary aesthetic in the name of secure borders? The interpretation is dependent on the intrinsic prejudice of the viewer. If this is true, then perhaps everything we see is interpreted just so—perhaps even the legitimacy of the Mexico-US border wall?

Aesthetically perhaps the reverse of Century 21 and Toy an Horse, Prejudice Project seems to be the result of placing an unnatural product in an, or highly constructed unnatural environment. In other words, a Cartolandia house made mostly of used wood, a naturally occurring material, contrasts with the sensibility of a material such as concrete, which is typically used in constructing industrial settings and neo-globalist transportation systems, not to mention institutions and security-protected federal buildings, such as boarding schools, correctional facilities. Some religious institutions, banks, and courthouses today are even built with industrial materials such as concrete and steel. In this way, it begins to become clear that our living spaces, affiliations, and daily lives in general, are increasingly moving us increasingly away from possibilities of interaction with our natural environment.

Topographic borders, for example, which are naturally occurring such as valleys, rivers, canyons, mountains, and oceans, contribute to the survival of a functional and ecological landscape. By contrast, highways and bridges, borders and inspection stations are unnatural dividers and re-mappers of land that strip the land of its richness.

To recap: Whereas Century 21 and Toy an Horse placed a natural product in an unnatural environment, in Prejudice Project the media and the spatial context are more congruent. It may be interpreted, then, that Prejudice Project is aesthetically more organic or natural than all of ERRE’s installation pieces before it, because for the first time, it blends in as a natural part of its physical surroundings, somehow using the positive space we perceive to say something about the negative spaces in between that we commonly overlook.

ERRE’s presentation of the negative space through art could be understood as the creation of a representational space (Lefebvre, 1974) where previously only representations of space and the spatial practices within these conceived spaces existed. ERRE questions the
spatial practices of mainstream society on the Mexico-US border, such as the construction of: the border, the ports of entry and exit, and the surrounding landscaping. An online essay used the phrase “production of relations between objects and products” to define Lefebvre’s concept of spatial practices. The “production of relations between objects and products” (Lefebvre, 1974) is disrupted when a society questions the perceived requirement for civil Marshall Law on borders. Within his historical context, ERRE did just that in Prejudice Project during an especially critical time for social relations on the border. Rachel Teagle conducted an interview with ERRE for the Strange New World catalogue, in which he had the following to say about the Minutemen’s significance to the American west, and therefore to the border:

> The minutemen are to the American west what the Ku Klux Klan was to the south” vicious and cowardly bigotry organized into a self-riteous mob…in all his work, [Ramírez] aspires to maintain complexity, introduce the notion of ambiguity and cultivate opportunites for communal reflection…aspires to nothing less than a search for the truth, but as he eloquently explains, “the truth is a complicated dance partner. (MCASD, 2006b, p. 206)

Here, Lefebvre can be applied yet again. Teagle’s observation that ERRE is continually intrigued by signage illuminates a semiotic indication in ERRE’s work and brkings the built environment to the center of the questioning. Questioning, which on Lefebvre’s spatial levels, leads to new ideas and social and cultural capacities. Prejudice Project questions the practices of the infamous Minutemen of Mexico-US—a form of civil arrest that keeps people away from the opportunity to feed and clothe their families, asking: *is this so unnatural a practice that it needs to be criminalized? Or is the real unnatural practice that which divides us from each other and allows us to police each other?*

### 5.4 BODY OF CRIME

Figure 5.9 below is a photo of ERRE’s Body of Crime at its Artpace exhibit in San Antonio. From Figures 5.10 and 5.11 pulled from local media, it is apparent that the types of images released in the mainstream about the drug war are representing and reinforcing people’s stereotypes about the reality of narcotrafficking.
Figure 5.9. Photo of Body of Crime. 2008, installation/performance.

Figure 5.10. Narco-traficking suspects detained by Mexican authorities.
2008 was a bloody year for Tijuana. The war on drugs had made the border region a very dangerous and dreaded place with the worst nightmares of Tijuana families coming true everyday as their loved ones’ bodies showed up dead one by one. In 2008, the volatile and precarious socio-political climate of the Mexico-US Border brought up serious questions about the safety and livability of the region, pushing art practices down the priority list while transborder people entered an endless state of panic and suspense. By contrast, ERRE’s artistic practice ran straight into the warzone, persisting to speak the message of transcendence through the complexity of identity and fragmented geopolitical space.

Entering the San Diego arts context, Body of Crime was exhibited at the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art as well as in the Artpace exhibit in San Antonio in 2008. As Kate Bonansinga (2008a) observed, the piece’s aesthetic was multidimensional:

ERRE’s Artpace exhibition, The Body of Crime, consists of several interrelated works: a sculptural installation, a video projection, photographs, and audio elements, all of which relate to a fictitious crime scene set along the United States/Mexico border. Appropriating forensic methods and strategies, ERRE assumes an objective viewpoint while at the same time questioning—and forcing the viewer to question—the role of such an observer in creating meaning and defining character. The exhibition extends the artist’s ongoing practice of leading viewers to recognize how changes in context create changes in meaning.

Linking Bonansinga’s observation of ERRE’s appropriation of forensic methods and strategies to the literal meaning of ERRE’s title for the piece unveils Lefebvrian spatial questioning. Corpus Delicti is the Latin phrase for the criminal law connotation of Body of Crime, which holds the rule of “no body, no crime.” The full definition is cited below:
Corpus Delicti is one of the most important concepts in a murder investigation. For example, when a person disappears and is unable to be contacted, many police agencies initiate a missing person case. If, during the course of the investigation of this missing person, the investigating detectives believe that he/she has been murdered by another individual, then, a “body” or all collected evidentiary items to include physical, demonstrative, and testimonial evidence, must be obtained that establishes that the missing individual has indeed been murdered before a suspect can be charged with homicide. (Corpus Delicti, n.d.)

By Lefebvre, it seems that in order for murder to have taken place, by law, would require all evidentiary items to include physical (actual corroboration), demonstrative (logical or conceptual corroboration), and testimonial evidence (emotive or experiential corroboration). This is invading all levels of space with a bureaucratic bar that in this case, actually enables cold-blooded murderers free access to our societies and our children. In ERRE’s piece, he has gathered all the testimonial evidence and presented it to us in a ruptured way: the gut-wrenching experience of losing loved ones to a drug war, crossing one more time in their honor, if only to join in the struggle with knowledge of how it feels to creatively risk everything for survival.

Aesthetically Body of Crime is similar to Prejudice Project in that it invades the Physical Urban Space of Tijuana/San Diego. Also, both pieces exploit the traffic of transborder vehicles, automatically and without permission, incorporating this undeniable and continuous physical transborder reality into the art. Juan Angel Chávez said in The Speaker Project:

…and more of an experiment, in terms of function... So, the piece in essence is a box where you can put live musicians or performers and basically force the audience to participate by listening and interjecting and interacting with the object itself. That's the simplest way I can put it. (As cited in Sawyer, 2008)

Similar to the Speaker Project, Body of Crime elicits a response from people that is forced in a way and because when the audience looks into the mirror their initial reaction to the piece is revealed to them, thus, forcing them to look beyond that reaction and into their own complex subjectivity.

ERRE’s vision was that Body of Crime forced the audience to identify the same image with many different roles associated with the Mexican drug cartels, and then look at themselves with mirrors that labeled them as the assassin, the victim, the narcotraficante, Prejudice Project made you identify which side you were on in the Minutemen debate. In contrast, Body of Crime has no identity — its purpose is to testify to the inevitable inclusivity
of dynamics that emerge from a land as complex and misunderstood as the borderlands. The assassin, police officer, and victim of ERRE’s staged drug cartel assassination in the documentary, the Black Suburban, are all him, an element that makes an interesting statement about identity. You can’t run away from the others inside you. ERRE said in an interview on Body of Crime: “I make art to balance out all the evil. Many people can't handle Tijuana. I'm fascinated by it, but I'm crazy” (Rosenberg, 2008).

ERRE combined media of video, performance, and installation art in order to deconstruct a specific type of transborder movement, and reveal the process of narco-trafficking and the underlying political corruption inherent to it. Bonansinga (2008a), appropriating Body of Crime, catalogued for Artpace in 2008:

The film’s narrative explores the moral ambiguity of the three characters involved, all played by ERRE: the assassin, the policeman, and the victim. In contrast to commercial crime epics of violent bloodshed that saturate popular culture, the personas and staging in ERRE’s film are mundane, even barren, more accurately reflecting the grim reality of the drug war… As in his video, ERRE is ever present here, yet never clearly one person or the other, highlighting the masquerade of identity and the instability of truth.

Again here, we see the Lefebvrian trialectics of space and the number three coming into play, perhaps alluding to the Carpenter/Lawyer and artist within ERRE and the multiple personalities with whom we all negotiate on a regular basis in our experiences of life. On the Tijuana/San Diego border, this process of identifying and re-identifying contributes to the big picture of appropriating and re-appropriating space, while negotiating and re-negotiating transborder identities. This creative practice ultimately leads to producing and reproducing presentations that question representations of the border.

Physical exposure to the tangible physicality of painful realities of the other serves an important purpose. When we deconstruct Mexico-US, it shows Earth’s people that in order to respond to problems in the border region, we must first disconnect and disrupt the political and economic ties and identify ourselves within this story including governments and corporations inter in opening borders for free trade. ERRE successfully made it to the other side of the cave, as Plato would call our perceived and conceived spaces, or what we know, in this case, about the Mexico-US Drug War, with an awakened consciousness of personal experience and an agenda of understanding the other, finally reaching the conclusion that the other resides within himself. He lived the experience of driving across the border to buy guns
and drive the narco route, later to empty out a full clip on his own truck. This artistic process put ERRE in a sort of participant observer position where he chose certain experiences which would typically be lived by multiple and different transborder subjects and lived them simultaneously as many co-occurring realities in one physical body. ERRE’s performative experience proves that identifying the other is only as difficult as identifying oneself as a part of the design or the system that defines our roles within.

As before mentioned, other artistic practices of the time such as Ituarte’s Casa del Tunel resourcefully used the narco trafficking problem as a catalyst for exchanges of artistic expression. Although ERRE also played on the narco trade for artistic material, Body of Crime seems to engender a different artistic philosophy. The piece confronts narco-trafficking on a personal level that exposes the complex inseparability of the factors and players involved. Departing from Ituarte, who defends Tijuana’s “good” aspects, saying that “the artists are the ones who are going to show people the way,” Lefebvresque questions could be asked of ERRE’s intention in making Body of Crime. ERRE is less focused on “showing the way” to the good in Tijuana. He instead seeks to deliver a specific message that exposes the way transborder subjects contribute to an intricate web of representations that form our complex border reality as we perceive it. An agenda that is perhaps less political and more introspective than his previous pieces, is exposing “the grim reality of the drug war.” ERRE, while probably less eager to turn a drug tunnel into an art space, than to ask questions about the lived reality of that drug war, is using spaces of representation and spatial practices and adding another layer to the experience of this spatial “reality,” to perform under the representational space that is the artistic experience.

Read in a more global sense, Body of Crime alludes to the possibilities of imagination to illuminate our current conditions as subjects adapting our identities to our spaces and negotiating our spaces. A deconstructed view of reality allows the imagination to transcend the semiotic limits of spaces of representation and question the validity of representing reality as a set of constructs.
In my subjective view, *Body of Crime* demonstrates just how ironically close life is to performance. Who is running this system in which one person can play so many different parts? How can we better co-evolve with the other\(^{26}\) instead of annihilating it for short-term gain?

I had heard from those who attended that ERRE’s opening for Body of Crime was an extremely emotional event. I would imagine my own subjectivity growing up as the offspring of a possibly suspect clan: the Iranian Americans. In my own geopsychee, I remember clearly men intruding my house in the night. I don’t know exactly how, but little Sara felt that these men were invading the emotive or experiential level of her life, somehow robbing her of the full experiential possibilities by carelessly inflicting an interrogatory trauma—the high and real fear of being pursued by the law, which can potentially place limits on your capacity to act. In other words, fear paralyzes you. So I ask myself, how many other little Sara’s are there? How many others like me had felt accused without a body of crime connecting them to allegations against their families and therefore themselves? Who were these men who were invading my home and what did their home life look like? What were they like they as children? ERRE’s *Ultimate Game* piece warned Americans in 2000 to “pay attention to the games [our] children play” in the midst of so much violence pushed into their growing brains, transforming them into little soldiers to carry out military commands (cited in Valenzuela, n.d.). ERRE shows how men culturally grow up to be intelligenza invaders, because they are bred to be that way, as in *Body of Crime*, he counter-invades his invader. He becomes the invaded, the invader, and the invasion itself. I connect with this argument on a deep level, especially, as other women of color have noted, being on the other side of these little “GI-Joe” boys in grade school, watching their militant hostility, reinforced by their indoctrinated fear and hatred of the other. This came out as hurtful teasing from one child to the other. Now that my son is gaining a notion of following patriarchal male examples around him, (idolatry is quite common in a four year-old) he is fascinated and awed by the

\(^{26}\) Emily Hicks in advising session, 2011
presence of military in his everyday public surroundings. “Look, Mommy! A real soldier!”
I’m gonna be a soldier when I grow up.”

5.5 Eyes/Ice Tower

Figure 5.12 is a photograph of ERRE’s EYES/ICE Tower (2008), next to Figure 5.13, which shows Immigration Customs and Enforcement Surveillance Cameras.

“One Team, ONE Mission, Securing Our Homeland.”
-DHS.gov 2008

Figure 5.12. Photo of Eyes/ICE Tower. 2008, installation.

Figure 5.13. ICE surveillance cameras.
In the art world of 2008, the *2008 California Biennial* addresses a number of questions in an era of proliferating Biennials: How does one approach a *transborder* biennial?:

NEWPORT BEACH, CA— The *2008 California Biennial* continues the Orange County Museum of Art’s four-decade long history of presenting new developments in contemporary art. This year’s biennial is guest-curated by Lauri Firstenberg, founder and director/curator of LA><ART in Los Angeles. Firstenberg’s approach to the *2008 California Biennial* is expansive—the exhibition includes works by more than 50 artists and, for the first time, incorporates off-site projects with collaborating venues from Tijuana to Northern California. The *2008 California Biennial* is on view at the Newport Beach and Orange Lounge galleries from October 26, 2008–March 15, 2009.

Firstenberg has identified key established artists who have had a profound impact on the development of contemporary art and who represent divergent histories, trajectories, languages, and tactics. These artists include Andrea Bowers, Bruce Conner, Sam Durant, Morgan Fisher, Mary Kelly, Tony Labat, William Leavitt, Daniel Joseph Martinez, Ruben Ortiz–Torres, Raymond Pettibon, Yvonne Rainier, Marcos Ramírez ERRE, and Andrea Zittel. Firstenberg places these established artists in dialogue with approximately 30 emerging artists, many of whom have been influenced by their work. …

The spontaneity and flexibility of these independent organizations collaborating in the Biennial complement the work at the Museum and represent a model for exhibiting art based on risk and experimentation. (Orange County Museum of Art, 2008)

In a climate of globalism and transnationalism, how does a regional biennial serve artists and audiences? What is distinctive about cultural production at this point in time, in this context? How does one approach contemporary artistic practices based on locational parameters? Questions of otherness and inclusivity remain central.

The arts economy was also funding new portals of expansion. *Eyes/ICE Tower* was built and paid for, probably by the various awards he’d won in the years before *Eyes/ICE Tower*. In the section of the USA Artists website entitled: “What do USA Fellows do with their awards?“ they found the following statistical information which is itself proof of the evolving nature of the cultural economy, if you consider the artists that are being recognized and funded and the messages behind their work:

United States Artists awarded its first 50 $50,000 USA Fellowships in December 2006, recognizing a total of 54 American artists (including four working as collaboratives). Six months later we asked the first USA Fellows how they had used the funds, through the first of a series of brief surveys designed to build our
understanding of the impact this direct support has on living artists and their creative work...83% develop a new project. 69% advance or finish an existing project. 62% purchase art supplies. (San Diego Art Prize, 2009)

In addition to United States Artist, the San Diego Art Prize was another grant ERRE won in 2008. Below is a description of the award which contextualized the piece within the context of the contemporary arts economy.

The San Diego Art Prize is a cash grant which recognizes excellence in the visual arts. The prize is dedicated to the idea that the visual arts are a necessary and rewarding ingredient of any world-class city and a building block of the lifestyle of its residents. Conceived to promote and encourage dialogue, reflection and social interaction about San Diego’s artistic and cultural life (San Diego Art Prize, 2009).

Aesthetically EYES/ICE Tower, on top of ERRE’s border studio, Estación Tijuana, was carefully carpentered, built to look just like a surveillance tower and is actually was a fully functional surveillance tower that keeps an unblinking view on the Immigration Customs and Enforcement, fed live to the Orange County Art Museum. ERRE turned may heads with the making of Eyes/ICE Tower. Among them was Susan Morgan. Morgan’s 2007 article states of the piece:

A new work created for the California Biennial, consists of a video camera installed on the rooftop of Estación Tijuana, which delivers live feed to the Orange County Museum of Art: an unblinking view of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the barbed-wire fence that marks the Border. (United States Artist, 2007)

Historically, ERRE’s tower was responding to a particular growing trend in US Foreign Policy toward fear of the other and greater constraints on human movement. The Department of Homeland Security’s 2008 budget allocation report reveals the costliness of national security measures and therefore logically, the level of priority given to these types of governmental actions. Here the investments become evident in numbers as well as compartmental itemizations of how the money was spent.

- **Information Technology Investments**
  
  This increase will fund: the modernization of the ICE portion of the DHS Investigative Case Management system; projects to improve infrastructure and technology and functionality of IT products and services available to ICE employees; DRO Modernization to upgrade and improve systems supporting DRO business processes for the detention and removal of illegal aliens; and ICE’s portion of the DHS enterprise-wide initiative of consolidating a number of financial systems and migration to a new DHS financial system in the future.
- **Field Intelligence Groups..........................................................S2.8M**
  This funding will increase staffing for the Office of Intelligence’s Field Intelligence Groups, which support ICE operations in the field. (Department of Homeland Security, 2009)

From this information it is evident that excluding the other is apparently a costly task. The national security institutions have decided that they ought to go forward with these measures at any cost. ERRE stated his vision with *Eyes/ICE Tower* that “Chicano artists often have a problem of feeling they have left their culture behind. They learn a new language but forget the old one—and that’s sad.” This piece is Marcos’ clever response to being watched as a *transborder* subject. He puts himself in the position of the watcher, “vigilando” los vigilantes, by building a high-tech surveillance tower over his homebase, *Estación Tijuana*, that allows for close 24-hour monitoring of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Surveillance Unit. This piece has a surprisingly inviting nature, as it brings the viewer to Ramírez’s homebase upon viewing it, as if somehow saying, this topic is very close to home for me. He probably can relate to the feeling of being watched, even at home, but this time, Marcos is taking the binoculars into his own hands and seeing for himself as if to say, *I see you spying on me*. The “return of the gaze” and the panopticon are… The piece could be interpreted as an official message on behalf of the colonized, or oppressed, other within each of us that we know we are being watched and stage-managed. Marcos was recognizing the sense that it is inside this production, this giant hamster cage, or matrix, that most of our day-to-day processes take place. This sense of the magnitude of the *power and control* of the greater machine has re-awakened and evolved despite our great codependence on the comforts of our system.

Spatially, a surveillance operation that “*eyes ICE Tower*” reveals that process of tracking individual human movement through politically constructed spaces. Aesthetically anti-monumental *Eyes/ICE Tower* takes process-oriented art to a whole new realm, as its title evokes the humor of different pronunciations leading to different understandings of the same words. The Anglo pronunciation of eyes is different than the Latino which enunciates the s as a true s sound. Whereas *Body of Crime* desperately and honorably struggled to capture physical evidence that alludes to an essence of the “true” Tijuana/San Diego *transborder condition*, *Eyes/ICE Tower* scrutinizes the processual focus of efforts to control and define this *transborder condition*. ERRE does this quite deliberately with scorn so as to play with
the experiential space and show that questioning our spaces is a process of self-discovery, not a definitive act with a conclusionary goal.

Similarly, another literary questioner of borders Louise Amoore (2007) at the Department of Geography & Institute for Hazard and Risk Research, University of Durham, UK, wrote an article entitled: *Vigilant Visualities: The Watchful Politics of the War on Terror*. The text read:

[...] a form of visual culture that is, W. J. T. Mitchell (2002: 170) reminds us, 'not limited to the study of images and media', but extends also 'to everyday practices of seeing and showing'. In the spirit of this openness to multiple manifestations of the domain of the visual and visual practices, the article explores how a particular mode of vigilant or watchful visuality has come to be mobilized in the 'homefront' of the so-called war on terror. In homeland security programmes from border and financial screening to Highway Watch, how has sight become represented as the sovereign sense on the basis of which security decisions can be taken? (Amoore, 2007, p. 215)

Here Mitchell asks: how has sight become represented as the sovereign sense on the basis of which security decisions can be taken? This raises some very interesting larger questions about how we conceive our spaces.

As an Iranian-American woman growing up in the Midwest I became aware that I was under surveillance/scrutiny at a very young age. Men in uniforms or suits started to become less trustworthy and helpful in my mind’s associations of them as I grew older and started to open my eyes to this feeling of being under watch. Departing from this awareness, I increasingly developed and identified with the feeling of being the illegal one, the outcast, the outsider, the crazy one, the unknown one to be feared. I can’t help but feel empowered then, as I express my resistance against this classification, against this condition artistically and literarily. I do this by assuming personal responsibility in redefining the parameters of my identity, questioning the limits of my potential to develop an original voice that transcends borders. I redefine, in other words, my *transborder condition* through my *transborder experiences*.

### 5.6 187 PAIRS OF HANDS

*187 Pairs of Hands* (1994) shown below in Figure 5.14 is followed by a map of California’s vote outcome for Proposition 187 (see Figure 5.15), which originally denied certain rights to undocumented workers.
Opening the analysis with a view of the artistic context, ERRE’s 1994 piece *187 Pairs of Hands* was released the same year as inSITE94, in which he participated and received wide recognition for his work. Although this piece, unlike his first, Century 21, was not part of inSITE, he did exhibit the Piece in Los Angeles (Intrallude), Havana (VI Biennial), and independently in Tijuana during the congressional voting process on Proposition 187. As Garcia Canclini points out, there have been some observations of difficulty uniting, due to geopolitical and legal barriers and some artists encountered rejection and seclusion. There has since been a growth in understanding, in part, due to these types of deliberate cultural productions.

Aesthetically 187 Pairs of hands was a box constructed of 187 black and white photos of hands of California workers laid out around it in a perfect square formation at Tijuana’s CECUT entrance. There was a desk in front with book bolted to the top with a bio for each person, in the style of an INS racial profile. Historically, the piece was released in response
to the xenophobic Proposition 187 that had it not been overturned, would have denied basic human rights to undocumented immigrants. The process of making the piece was quite strategic. Ramírez photographed 187 workers—mostly Mexican migrants—in California doing their everyday jobs, and displayed the black and white prints in a square formation on the gallery floor. Kate Bonansinga re-capped physical aspects of the pieces:

An installation by Mexican-born artist Marcos Ramírez "ERRE" slyly celebrates the Puritan work ethic. Spread out over most of Iturralde Gallery's floor and many of its walls, 187 black-and-white photographs depict the hands of men and women hard at work.

An impressive inventory of labor is displayed: Hands sewing, filing, roofing, repairing, typing and vacuuming are interspersed with hands steering trucks, picking strawberries, serving burgers, hauling fertilizers, welding mufflers, selling cars, operating computers and pouring cement, coffee or cocktails. (As cited in Pagel, 1996)

Only those who come into the gallery could view the piece, but like Century 21, it was situated at the entrance before the viewer purchases an admission ticket. *187 Pairs of Hands*
has received international recognition by critics. David Pagel’s (1996) article talked of Ramírez’s “rebellious edge” that was “too savvy for political finger-pointing:”

Librarians, police officers, firefighters, butchers, grocers, reporters, carpenters, consultants, artists, dealers and musicians are equally represented in Ramírez's spirited version of American inclusiveness. Although profoundly contemporary, his installation is part of a democratic tradition powerfully described by Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Like their works, Ramírez's 187 Pairs of Hands has a rebellious edge. Offered as an argument against the state proposition that aims to limit the rights of undocumented immigrants, this work includes a cell-like enclosure with four makeshift sculptures and a large homemade book in which each person photographed has written his or her name, age, birthplace, job and immigration status.

Too savvy for political finger-pointing, Ramírez's installation stands as a haunting reminder of the ideals on which the United States was founded. A supple indictment of current hypocrisy, it also serves as a pointed document of the hard work required by all citizens if the promise of democracy is to be anything more than a dream.

Pagel’s (1996) contention that 187 pairs of hands was an “indictment” and a “pointed document of the hard work required by all citizens if the promise of democracy is to be anything more than a dream” is insightful. In other words, ERRE is assigning us all a task: to use our experiences in imaginative new ways that promote social and cultural capital.

ERRE’s vision of his installation piece is relevant and significant because it is an early example of ERRE’s direct dialogue with lawmakers about his opinion of their unjust and illogical immigration laws that make it next to impossible for transborder people to make a livelihood and benefits from their jobs.

Another subjective appropriation by theorist Norma Iglesias Prieto finds that one of the pieces of 1994 that “showed the growing tendency to refer to the singularity of transborder phenomena” (such as undocumented migration, for example) “with an evident political content was 187 Pairs of Hands by Marcos Ramírez ERRE” (Iglesias Prieto, 2006). Iglesias Prieto concludes that although Prop 187 was finally overturned in Federal Court, its genesis and journey through the electoral process “naturalized the racism that exists in the United States against Mexicans,” (Iglesias Prieto, 2006) Ramírez’ exhibition, she says, humanizes and makes visible the migrant workers in the United States, shows the importance of their work in the economy of the neighboring country, and “discovers political
mechanisms by which racial rhetoric[s] [as well as] the use of [these mechanisms] in electoral campaigns.”

In the spirit of questioning history and with the intention to expose and challenge the illogical injustice of concepts constructed around the Mexico-US border, ERRE launched the piece at the same moment when legislators were actually passing CA Prop. 187. This all occurred during the Republican Party Convention. ERRE revealed his imagination of new dimensions of identity when he said: “People’s hands were their identities.” If identity were marked by something as arbitrary or trivial as an Identification number then it is not too far-fetched to use someone’s hand to distinguish them from a group of individuals. But 187 Pairs of Hands adds an intriguing element to the mix. Launched at the very moment the legislation to deny undocumented immigrants basic human rights was being passed 187 Pairs of Hands did not group people based on the condition of their legal status or ethnic otherness, but instead on the condition of being employed in the state of California.

Historically contextualizing, the Office of Immigration Statistics Policy Directorate in 2009 defined nonimmigrant through a series of highly specific racial and neo-commercial classifications. Under the heading Nonimmigrant Admissions to the United States: 2009, Randall Monger and Macreadie Barr stated:

Nonimmigrants are aliens whose classes of admission are specified in Section 101(a)(15) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). Examples of nonimmigrant classes of admission include foreign government officials; temporary visitors for business or pleasure; aliens in transit; treaty traders and investors; academic and vocational students; temporary workers; exchange visitors; athletes and entertainers; victims of certain crimes; and family members of U.S. citizens, LPRs, and special immigrants. Maximum duration of stay is determined by class of admission. A person granted lawful permanent resident status3 is authorized to live, work, and study in the U.S. permanently; conversely, a nonimmigrant is in a temporary status as a visitor or short-term resident for a specific purpose and whose activities, and accompaniment by dependents, are prescribed by his or her class of admission. (As cited in Pagel, 1996)

This classification and others are indicative of the level of xenophobia persisting and spreading through official channels. Re-categorizing or rejecting the countless constructed classifications that produce otherness can be a very empowering and cathartic act. Those who are willing to sacrifice a fraction of the extreme comfort and break free from the state-consumer codependency model will free up much mental energy to be spent questioning the inner workings that make this constructed reality possible.
I reflect in response to this spatial questioning. 187 Pairs of Hands makes me long for the other. The other is everything but me. I think about other human beings, especially those who come from walks of life very distant to my own. Breaking down the idea of racial profiling into its elemental reality: capturing the hands that are doing the work through portraits, somehow objectifies the subjective personal experience and makes it more operational. What this says about the Lefebvrian levels of space, as I mentioned earlier is that the emotive or the experiential, as I call it, is the level with the greatest potential for innovation, movement, and inevitable change. This is not to place a chronological hierarchy on Lefebvre’s levels of space; it should be clear that here on the Experiential past, present and future are all simultaneous realities as feelings, memories, thoughts, and dreams. Reflecting once again I remember how my subjectivity acts as a channel that connects me to 187 Pairs of Hands. Growing up in an Iranian-American family, I know what it feels like to be the first born in a new land, seeking approval through families’ historical expectations while attempting to make a connection with the receiving community for a “better future”. This is my way of understanding my meta-discourse as experientially mixed and multidimensional. So much so, in fact that it breaks even the analytical mold of this research. I feel at times that I get lost in the past and the present expectations, which is very psychological. This deconstructive self observation has led me to question the confines of my left brain.

5.7 Sing Sing Love as a First Language: Decompartmentalizing the Human Heart

Below is sing sing love as a first language(Figure 5.16) and following is a photo of sing sing prison (Figure 5.17) and the prop 227 english-only in schools campaign (Figure 5.18).

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27 In this case, the work the people have performed, each valued and portrayed as an equally integral part of what we conceive to be our built or physical “reality.”

29 Some critics have discussed memories and dreams in relation to the Deleuzian category of the virtual, Manuel Delanda’s written about Deleuze’s work in Intensive Science (Hicks, 2011).
Figure 5.16. The wrought-iron heart-shaped cell piece in *Sing Sing Love as a First Language*, shown above, was installed indoors to symbolize the detainment aspect, whereas the national security aspect was portrayed by the externally-installed armored heart. 1999, sculpture, size of original work: 12’x 20’x 11’.

Figure 5.17. The cold aesthetic of Sing Sing Prison is shown here in this 1825 photo.
Contemporary activity in the artistic universe suggested that the San Diego art context seemed to be coming around more and more into the transborder art movement, although second to her sister Tijuana, who continued to raise questions about the border through art tirelessly and with serious intentions. In 1999, in line with the uprise of conceptual art in San Diego’s intellectual and societal spaces, the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art Much More Here On Art And The Border exhibit featured ERRE’s piece *Sing Sing Love as a First Language* (1999). Aesthetically, for this set of armoured hearts with high priority given to craftsmanship in agreement with ERRE’s other pieces. It is a series of carefully carpentered giant human hearts made of metal installed at the spatial setting of San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art, Downtown, in gallery, and in front of Trolley. Installed in natural environment, *Sing Sing Love as a First Language* was interestingly displayed inside a gallery and in public urban space to incorporate the installation genre, adding a new dimension to the piece. ERRE said in relation to the piece: “Before nationalities, we were all hearts” (Ramírez ERRE, 2006). Historically, *Sing Sing Love as a First Language* is significant to Marcos’ body of political/legislative protest Installations, as the artist’s intention behind the giant metal sculpture of the human heart was to put into question the educational legislation that heartlessly put the “English-only” model of teaching into effect in public schools, violating the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo to the disadvantage of transborder families, and leaving millions of non-English speaking children to fight to understand instruction in the classroom.

The title of the piece refers to the infamous “silent prison,” where prisoners were forbidden to speak, laugh, or show any emotion in their faces.
In May 1825, Lynds and 100 inmates from the depths of Auburn prison were loaded onto a wooden barge and sailed down the Hudson River to Mt. Pleasant. There, under the most stringent conditions imaginable, exposed to the elements, with little food, no buildings or shelter of any kind, construction began on Sing Sing prison, warehouse for society's worst criminals and destined to become one of the most repressive institutions in America. (Sing Sing, n.d.)

This devastating historical reference expresses ERRE’s deep rejection of outlawing bilingual teaching programs in public schools. Along with other reviews of Sing Sing Love Love as a First Language, TRANSactions statement of Sing Sing talks to its paradoxical meaning and the emotion it evokes:

While Ramírez’s work often addresses cultural issues, he also creates works that speak to universal themes of humanity. A wrought-iron cage in the shape of a heart, Sing-Sing loosely suggest associations of the passionate heart—a place of forced solitude, as much a sanctuary as a cell and as private as it is exposed. (MCASD, 2006b, p. 146)

The aesthetic tradition of using wrought iron can be found in ERRE’s family; his father currently manages an iron works company. Thus this material is very personal and close to the heart to ERRE, just as is the subject material. Perhaps also an allusion to the cursi, or kitschy wrought iron birdcages and other curios, or souveniers that fill Tijuana’s tourist gift shops (Montezemolo et al., 2006, p. 175). Shifting to spatial effects of the piece, juxtaposing this with the seriousness of a debate such as language in schools is so conceptually representational of Tijuana, yet through the action of juxtaposing the two, ERRE is shifting paradigms… as with all of his work, he performs this task with a love and dedication for the experience of social production.

In a historical context, it is noteworthy that the 1999 ratification of Prop 227 in public schools took on global historical importance in world history because of enforced limitations on human rights. The right to express one’s self freely and in one’s mother tongue is recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the constitutions of most countries.

At Sing Sing Prison, forbidden to speak and incarcerated within their own hearts, prisoners lost their identity and contained their individuality for lifetimes. ERRE used this allusion to inspire the concept, title, and aesthetic of his piece; to formulate an emotive expression regarding the sudden erasure of the right to learn in one’s own language. Sing Sing Love as a First Language was released in 1999 in response to Proposition 227 which
enforced the “English Only” Law in Schools. Ramírez’s artistic act showed the authorities that he could make a jail, too. The key distinguishing factor between ERRE’s reproduction and the original Sing Sing, the torturous 1825 silent prison, was the placement—internal versus external. This is a pattern in ERRE’s work; he captures history and puts a cryptic spin on it, reproducing it through artistic production, as if to encourage the consideration of alternative viewpoints of the past.

With this, I ponder spatial questions Sing Sing Love as a First Language raises. As with this piece, the problematic of the critical time-space specific to Tijuana/San Diego is always central to ERRE’s theme choice. The reason for this is two-fold; besides the fact that San Diego is in ERRE’s native Tijuana backyard and close to his heart, a marriage of aforementioned sociopolitical factors (mentioned before) have made this dynamic borderlands so asymmetrical and problematic, yet constantly in search of a solution. ERRE, like other transborderlanders, have been responding to and negotiating with these dilemmas in many different languages because this is a strategy that makes sense in the complex and borderlands context.

As stated before, lands that are in severe states of crisis and flux naturally tend to trigger creative catharses from their people—both as a mechanism for survival as well as an attempt to purge the ill effects of disjointed political practices. ERRE knows that serious times call for serious measures, so for Sing Sing, he metaphorically cut out his own heart and exhibited it cathartically in his first language, love. In a way, ERRE becomes a healer by opening a safe space for discourse on a silenced matter, inviting viewers to engage in discussions of the subtle underlying emotional effects of being barred from using their sacred mother tongue.

One subjective appropriation of Sing Sing Love as a First Language was the blurb on the piece from the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art archive stated:

Two hearts are disconnected by the Museum structure: an ominous, armoured heart covered with camouflage stands outside, while an open, wrought iron cage rests within. ERRE loosely suggests cultural associations, connecting traditional representations of hard-heartedness and distance to the outdoor organ while the interior heart is more passionate, therefore caged and suffering. (MCASD, 2006b, p. 146)

Tuning into Lefebvre and spatial rethinking, MOCA could be suggesting that we as a nation-state are fighting and militarizing our outside spaces and imprisoning ourselves within our
inside spaces, MOCA shows here the importance of ERRE’s work in recognizing the painful ruptures between our hearts. Across Tijuana-San Diego, experiences of people on each side of the border are compartmentalized, barred from interaction.

Aesthetically exposing the military presences at our edges, camouflage carries a very different connotation when is represented in the form of a heart. This piece spoke to me personally on various levels. I appropriate it accordingly. Pondering this, I noticed that because of my Middle Eastern background, I have an especially acute awareness and a fierce hatred of war and corruption and often find myself on the minority side of political debates. In high school AP American Political Systems, I got into a huge argument over the perceived existence of precision bombing. My argument was that this idea in itself is absurd, and no one seems to question that. It was insane-making to have this white republican girl who had never stepped foot in a war stricken country, and whose father was some high-ranking military official, tell me that the priority of US military presence in the Middle East was not national interest, but instead conscious and careful bombing that resulted only in minimal civilian casualties. I knew that she believed the propaganda wholeheartedly, and that there was no point in arguing further, but how could I shut up when I knew better? I had seen firsthand, the effects of so-called “precision bombing” in my visits to the Middle East. This rhetoric has the potential power to erase certain narratives or make certain realities invisible.

Considering all this, any statement or expression that denounces killing and corporate greed is interesting to me. Perhaps because I feel less othered when there are other others around me. Knowing that ERRE had the balls to do what he did, to construct a piece out of metal so lovingly which boldly yet delicately reveals a seemingly obvious yet commonly overlooked universal truth: we all have hearts. In my present-day context in 2010 in these somewhat challenging times I like to be reminded of that. It makes me feel like I’m registered, like my history’s been written somehow …in the middle of all this public hatred in the name of religion, all this corruption, the terribly uncontained oil spill about to fall on our heads with the yet to be mentioned hurricanes, the assassinations of millions abroad, the fabrications of illusory statistics.

I remember a student teaching experience from my senior year in high school. I was assigned to a second grade classroom at Walnut Elementary School in Newbury Park, CA. A particular student who stayed with me in my memories was a little Mexican boy who had
trouble with English. In fact I quickly came to find that he neither spoke nor understood any English at all. How could he have made it this far, I asked myself until I realized that he hadn’t made it that far at all. This little boy had been moved up to the second grade and did not know how to read or write. While the other kids practiced writing sentences, he wrote gibberish on his paper and the teacher just basically ignored him. I started speaking Spanish to him and translating his homework into Spanish. Then, we learned the English words together by doing the assignment and by the time I left, he was doing a lot better with his English and in class. To me, this experience was proof that bilingual education was the only human way of transitioning transborder children’s educations from one side of the border to the other. Not to mention, it makes me question the validity of the perceived and conceived American educational system that denies our children this vital resource and takes no responsibility for the ill-effects of its failure. Hiring Spanish-speaking teachers means attracting more Latino families and changing the traditional White American way of doing things that completely leaves out the brown half of the story. I can just imagine the typical ignorant complaints: “PTA meetings, bake sales, open houses, does everything have to be in Spanish? I mean come on, this is America damnit.”

5.8 STRIPES AND FENCE FOREVER HOMAGE TO JASPER JOHNS: REAPPROPRIATING THE LANDSCAPE OF PATRIOTISM

Figures 5.19 and 5.20 show Stripes and Fence Forever: Homage to Jasper Johns, erected in New York City and one of Jasper Johns iconic Flag paintings.

Within the México-US art world and in the greater context of the international arts community, in 2000 and 2001, inSITE continued its collaborative interventions and communication efforts, actively rising more and more toward a more sophisticated discourse. *Fugitive Sites* was: “a publication that documents inSITE2000-01, a bi-national contemporary arts project based on artistic investigation and activation of urban spaces in San Diego and Tijuana” (Joselit, 2003, introduction). The text continues to report that between October 2000 through March 2001, inSITE launched twenty-seven diverse new projects as well as panel discussions, temporary exhibitions, programs and events. *Conversations* by inSITE included Harvey, Yúdice, Judith Barry, and Nestor García-Canclini. Meanwhile, ERRE saw to it that ruptures were being examined from both sides. He
Figure 5.19. ERRE’s piece was inspired by Jasper Johns, and anti-monumentally installed on the sub-level of a busy New York street. 2000, installation, size of original work: 8’x 10’x 10’.

Figure 5.20. Here, Jasper Johns’ original flag painting represents the symbol of the nation-state as an artistic production in itself.
traveled across the border and to New York City for the 2000 Whitney Biennial to have some conversations of his own. The aesthetics including the media and production process were original and appropriate. Using what looked to be an actual piece of the material from the border fence he made his own fence in the aesthetic of Jasper Johns’ iconic pieces entitled “Flag.” Jasper John’s “richly layered, deceptively simple Flag paintings…remain the gold standard of (flag-centered) artistic expression—and American icons in themselves” (Wordpress, 2009).

Moving into questions of space, I employ Lefebvre. Not unlike Johns’ work, Stripes and Fence Forever was an historic installation that questioned the forceful and insistent superimposition of patriotic and iconic American representations that fill in the U.S. border space right up to the Mexican side of the border. Aesthetically, ERRE’s media of choice was a painful reminder of the bloody consequences of the classic Western “divide and conquer” mentality, as the sheet metal and iron Marcos used to make the flag mimicked the border fence, which was made of actual WWII material, and represents suffering and death to those who have lost someone to a crossing.

The political and historical context around Stripes and Fence Forever is significant to note: George W. Bush and Vicente Fox took their countries’ respective presidential elections in a time where sentiment toward administrations was at a low. People in Mexico and US were really waiting for a change, and in a sense, many put all their hope in our leaders to reverse the corrupt political legacy of the PRI in Mexico and the shame of Clinton’s sex scandal. What would only be exacerbated by the events in September 2001, a growing sense of patriotism and need to “undo the wrong” was being exploited in order to gain the support of the public for political agendas.

One appropriation of the piece was that of Jennifer de Poyen. De Poyen wrote a violently revealing article entitled Seeing Stars And Stripes Amid All The Flag-Waving, A Writer Begins To Paint. She questions whether the political context, which no doubt, affects general local public sentiment, and therefore arts and cultural contexts, makes Jasper Johns’ flag obsolete and a symbol of shame that should be “burned in a private place.” De Poyen (2001) gives artistic context to support the piece:

…artists who employ patriotic imagery without patriotic zeal—and whose devotion may be to raising questions or exploring form—those Americans risk both censure and censor. What if this year’s Whitney Biennial had included
Mexican sculptor Marcos Ramírez’s tribute to Johns’ flags, which didn’t so much as raise a stir at the museum’s 2000 showcase of contemporary art? How would viewers have reacted to that piece, which re-imagines the Stars and Stripes as a corrugated metal fence on the U.S.-Mexican border, in this cultural moment? Would the Whitney have dared even show it? When your flag is no longer in a condition to be displayed with honor, it should be destroyed in a dignified way. Burning it in a private place, in a dignified ceremony, is best.

In line with de Poyen, ERRE reminds us that it is his conceptual understanding that social constructions are meant to be broken down and that history will take its course no matter what attempts emerge to try to control or direct the outcome. He said:

It's the same dirt, but the brick is the Mexican part, it's imperfect artisanry. The U.S. is the cinder block; everything has to be perfect, made the exact size. It's like an artificial fence. It's a border that 150 years ago was not there. Who knows if it will be there 150 years from now. (Ramírez ERRE, 2006)

Here, ERRE is referring to the physical aspects of the piece and giving the philosophical background behind it. Aesthetically, cinder block to represent the United States and rustically lain brick to represent Mexico. The United States is portrayed by an aesthetic of flawlessness, of high expectations of conformity, of organization. Mexico is presented as a collage, marked by the imperfect hands of the humans who are constantly rebuilding their own spaces. Lefebvre would agree that further than just the physical aesthetic, ERRE pushed people to question the process and the experience of representing space.

When I reflect, this piece speaks to my thoughts around flag-waving and patriotism. Especially in the post-911 Era, communities have seen a growth in United States flag postings all around the country and even across borders. Car windows and bumpers, front lawns, public spaces, schools—these all turned into places of representations of support for the Nation in these difficult times. “United We Stand.” What’s strange to me psychoanalytically speaking is that though I was born and raised in the U.S., I never felt that that was my Anthem, that that was my schoolyard, or that that was my flag. Attending Robert E. Lee Elementary that waved the confederate flag in its hallways and classrooms, I had to prove my patriotism daily by singing “America the Beautiful” and the National Anthem. Then, I put my hand over my heart and pledged my allegiance to the flag multiple times a day while my blood brothers and sisters in Iran put their hands in the air and chanted “Marg bar Aamreeka!” “Death to America!” Down with this country for all the death and pain it has caused abroad ruthlessly. Ironically pain is being inflicted on Iran’s people on national and
Transnational levels. Ending the killing machine is the only solution to ending the killing? This seems to be the cyclic, impulsive, invasive train of thought that is leading our children into the war trap.

5.9 **Road to Perdition: Paving Memorial Pathways of Resistance**

Figures 5.21 and 5.22 show Bingaman Bridge with and without the presence of Road to Perdition (2003). Figures 5.23 and 5.24 are photos of Iraqi casualties and the cover of ERRE’s War Notes publication.

Figure 5.21. ERRE produced a photo-montage illustrating what the landscape would have looked like with Road to Perdition erected in its intended location next to Bingaman Bridge. 2003, image montage, size of original work: 13’x 26’.

Figure 5.22. This photo shows Bingaman Bridge in Pennsylvania.
I start with aesthetic observations of *Road to Perdition*. Kate Bonansinga wrote in her 2008 article in Issue 48 of *Art Lies Quarterly*, about the physical aesthetic of *Reading project, Road to Perdition*’s later exhibition. Bonansinga also gives background history on *The Reading Project*, highlighting the negotiation process ERRE undertook in order to be able to show his piece:

Also critical of U.S. foreign policy is *The Reading Project*, a billboard-sized aluminum sign produced for this exhibition but based on the plans for an older work, *Mexico Illuminated*, which was to be a citywide exhibition in Reading, Pennsylvania in 2003. Comprised of reflective white letters on a green background, the piece is almost identical to highway exit markers, but rather than identifying the names of the streets bisecting the next few off-ramps, *The Reading Project* identifies cities bombed by the U.S. and their distances from Reading. The piece was censored by the city; the photograph presented here is a computer-generated representation of what one of ERRE’s interstate signs would have looked like had it been installed as originally planned. ERRE also produced an edition of thirteen-by-forty-five-foot signs that, except for their scale, are identical to this large piece. (Bonansinga, 2008b)

*Road to Perdition* got wide public attention, leading to others’ distinct subjective appropriations of the piece. Southern California theorist Mike Davis, who has followed ERRE for some time, did an insightful interview in 2003. He expands where Bonansinga’s
article leaves off, telling the detailed story of ERRE’s artistic and administrative commitment to *Road to Perdition*. Davis also includes physical aesthetics.

He won the approval of his sponsors and the Reading Redevelopment Authority to mount a public-art piece on a billboard next to the busy Bingaman Street Bridge. Imitating the green background and lettering of official highway signs, the proposed billboard simply lists eight cities bombarded or bombed by the United States, their distances from Reading, and the appropriate dates.

Ciudad de Mexico 3202 km 1847
Veracruz 3040km 1914
Hiroshima 11194 km 1945
Dresden 4837 km 1945
Hanoi 13206 km 1972
Ciudad de Panama 3497 km 1989
Kabul 10979 km 2001
Baghdad 9897 km 2003.

(Davis, 2003)

The information above, as Davis reports, includes the names of eight cities bombed or invaded by the U.S. between 1847 and 2003, and their distances from Reading. Baghdad being the most recent, is still being invaded today as part of the same war from 2003. Davis continues to reveal ERRE’s production process, which incorporated informal interactions with others, blending the lines between artist and community.

The Silverado lurches into a dirt side street somewhere on the proletarian backside of Chapultepec Heights. ERRE pulls up along a fence, honks his horn, and the debris is quickly unloaded by elves in rags. He hands one of them 100 pesos, or $7. (The minimum wage in the sweatshop *maquiladoras* is only 55 pesos per day.). (Davis, 2003)

In his vision, ERRE originally planned to situate the viewer by catching the gaze during a daily routine, e.g. driving and bombarding their senses with a painful shot of reality, one that interrupts their normal digestible constructed reality, where the viewer sees the world through all the others within Marcos Ramírez ERRE. Davis found that ERRE had a specific social experiment in mind in *Road to Perdition*.

Ramírez's idea was to let commuters puzzle out for themselves the meaning of the dates and the association between cities as disparate as Ciudad de Mexico, Dresden and Baghdad. He saw the piece as a "mirror" to help us analyze our own impact on the world. He hoped that Reading residents would become active participants in the dialogue. (Davis, 2003)

As Davis observes, ERRE is holding up the mirror to each individual viewer to show them what their ignorance and anger look like, and the historical mark that this collective
ignorance can leave. However, the effectiveness of the strategy is dependent at least in part on the openness of the viewer to the invitation to look within to the inner other. Davis (2003) highlights ERRE’s intent to incorporate audience reaction with the piece itself, with an agenda to engage the people living in the area in a discussion:

Even though the billboard has yet to be mounted, the local paper calls it "an eruption of outrage." Letters columns and radio talk shows have been inundated with angry denunciations of Ramírez’s supposedly "obscene America-bashing." The city of 82,000 doesn't seem to be talking about much else… Ramírez meanwhile is turning the backlash against his piece into yet more art. Using a computer, he has defiantly inserted his bombing chronology onto (a photo of) the Bingaman Street billboard. A wall-sized print of this montage will be mounted in the annex of the main exhibition at Albright College, along with documentation of the controversy. Viewers will be invited to register their own reaction.

Though *Road to Perdition* did not physically intervene the border space, Lefebvre would apply on conceptual and experiential levels. In the case of Reading, apparently this bit of history was too offensive to promote the kind of spatial questioning effect ERRE desired. Perhaps the memory of the piece will be erased from the city and all will go back to “normal.” Then again, someone might write about it and locals might start to ask questions. When linked with these types of debates and others sparked by public art, we find opportunities to delve deeper into the constructs that make our collective reality what it is and ask the questions that will lead to a re-writing of the history of the border.

ERRE’s vision and production of *Road to Perdition* was especially key in his trajectory, because it introduced him to a level of xenophobic bureaucracy he had not previously encountered, and more importantly because it transgressed borders, bringing a chilling global reality in writing to a public local space, thus converting the space into a *glocale*. A globally relevant local production, this installation was intended to be placed on a highway in Reading, Pennsylvania and marked by year and distance in kilometers, the international cities the United States has bombed. Since it never got the approval to go up, ERRE imagined its placement by mounting it electronically into a photo montage of Bingaman Highway. The message is so refreshingly simple: war is the *Road to Perdition* and as Reading residents would drive past the piece, mistaking it for a freeway sign at first glance, they would see war as their destination as opposed to a geographic location. This concept of exploring the literal meaning of an expression is common in conceptual art.
I reflect in the spirit of common subjective experiences of war by my fellow Middle Easterners. It seems that aside from making art about war, ERRE has the power to predict the future, as the losses along this bloody road have been many. March 19, 2003 Bush launches the Invasion of Iraq and claims to have found weapons of mass destruction. 2011, here we still are, having killed at least 1 million Iraqis. It can be discovered through a little informal research, that civilian war casualty information is less accurate for Iraq than for the US. What’s striking about all this is the accuracy of the World Health Organization’s Iraq Family Health Survey and the Opinion Research Business survey from Britain. The number is much higher, showing that the WHO didn’t do their homework—they didn’t cross the border into danger in order to get a correct death toll. Mike Davis was one of the “others” who appropriated Road to Perdition.

The artist Marcos Ramirez aka ERRE, whose Tijuana studio is a mere fifty yards from the nearest border patrolman, spends a lot of time staring at the storage culture on the other side. He likes gringos well enough, but sometimes is scared by our sublime ignorance of our own history (not to mention that of our neighbors). For example, how many of us ever bother to think about the contribution of strategic bombing to the American Way of Life? (Davis, 2003)

Our sublime ignorance of our own history (not to mention that of our neighbors) As Mike Davis observes, ERRE’s criticism of our sublime ignorance is unconscious obliviousness to the historical events that provided the space and resources for America to become what it is today. Heriberto Yepez (1997) recorded a blog in response to the upheaval and local public reaction to ERRE’s piece:

Preventing the billboard from being displayed is not banning the object itself, but preventing the relation between the object and the individual to take place. It appears American don't want to have a memory. Don't want to see their history as a totality and see the links between the facts, maybe wanting to stay fragmented, dispersed, in order to not make evident what they have been doing, and what other think of them.

A pattern of attacking and invading other countries that started with Mexico, and illegally taking half of our territory in 1848, a date still not forgotten for many Mexicans. Facts that American don't want to take seriously or remember, because American history is full of these kinds of attacks against others and oblivion about it. This is why Americans want to escape from reality. Electing Schwarzenegger for example. Substituting reality with illusory figures. Marcos Ramirez (aka Erre) is one of the most interesting Tijuana artist, by the way. His piece gives an idea of the growing critical tendency of Mexican culture toward American foreign and national politics.
Yepez was emotionally affected by the piece, but more importantly, his critique triggered by *Road to Perdition* illustrated the conceptual appropriateness of the piece. As Yepez observes, ERRE achieved this by connecting the history of Mexico-US Relations to the bigger picture of the US relations with other nations-states: a relational history of instigation, of bullying, of a sense of entitlement to all that is valuable.

Historically *Road* has many connotations that are contextually relevant in the particular Space-time of the early 2000s on the Mexico-US border. To show this connotation in common terms on the ground, I would like to shift focus to a Border road that ERRE questions. Neoglobalism and NAFTA, together with the help of US and Mexican governments have created part of the constructed reality that is leading to the destruction of the planet. The NAFTA Superhighway of 2002 was seen by many as a tragedy, a complete sell out of the Americas for Capital gain. People have referred to it as disgustingly gutting our country, “right through the heart of America.” The worst is that some people will benefit from this at the cost of suffering of others. It isn’t too farfetched, according to the CATO Institute’s: *How Pennsylvania Gains From NAFTA that* attributes the success of the Pennsylvania state economy to the Mexican and Canadian reduction of US Export Tariffs on manufactured goods.

By Lefebvre, questioning the constructed physical reality that lead to the division of people from one another, and from nature is the only way to begin to imagine it differently and live it differently. Ruptures like a super-industrial superhighway in nature that claim to “stimulate the economy” are actually dividing us from each other. The border roads Interstate-5 and Interstate-805 south are leading right into a land of total loss, of nothing to lose. To add historical context to contemporary border economic policy, I look at an economist’s work. Published on cato.org on April 8, 2008 by Alan Reynolds, a senior fellow with the Cato Institute, is the author of *Income and Wealth* are the following contentions:

The 1993 North American Free Trade Agreement, and free trade in general, have somehow emerged as hot campaign issues in the Democratic primary race. This is particularly odd in Pennsylvania because the state economy has done very well in exporting manufactured goods — something that would have been quite difficult if Canada and Mexico had not agreed to reduce their tariffs on U.S. goods.

For all the talk about lost jobs, they're hard to find in the data. The unemployment rate in Pennsylvania was 6.9 percent in September 1993 when NAFTA was enacted, and it is 4.9 percent today. (Reynolds, 2008)
Fascinatingly, CATO failed to mention that Mexicans were the ones losing jobs. As I cited previously, “[t]he agricultural sector, where almost a fifth of Mexicans still work, has lost 1.3 million jobs since 1994” (Audley, 2004). This history is shameful, especially amidst the violent claims that Mexicans came to the US to “take all our jobs” and “take advantage of the system” which are in turn proven misguided paradigms. Things aren’t always as they seem.

To contextualize in contemporary art practices regarding concepts and aesthetics I look at contagious south to north artistic trends. As the customary shock value of concept art that has been used to enhance its mystique, ERRE exploited the large-scale local community’s ‘eruption of outrage’ to get them to shift their collective focus to the distant realities they feed into, and the innate values they are programmed to defend. Aesthetically, this is an especially important feature to note, taking into consideration the San Diego art world’s growing preoccupation with performance, shock value, and pushing the borders of what is considered art.

Speaking from a subjective voice, a thought I had was that ERRE might have seen the relevance in the title of six Academy Award Nomination film *Road to Perdition* (shown in Figure 5.25) produced in 2002, the year before the planned exhibition of the Whitney Biennial. Following, is the Plot Summary by IMBD, which shows the physical manifestation or consequence of choices, for generations of people. As the film’s protagonist Mike Sullivan finds, we cannot expect our children to be any better than we are, or their choices to be any better than the choices we make:

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Mike Sullivan works as a hit man for crime boss John Rooney. Sullivan views Rooney as a father figure. However after his son is witness to a killing he has done Mike Sullivan finds himself on the run trying to save the life of his son and at the same time looking for revenge on those who wronged him

Throughout the film, we tried to fill the top of the frame with heavy objects to create a sense of compression and claustrophobia,…When Sullivan and his son are released into the second and third act of the movie, there's a sense that they're cut adrift in a mythic, empty landscape (El Toro, year unknown).

This photo that I found on the internet is entitled “Road to Perdition.” It is an interesting illustration of the concept.
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Figure 5.26. This photo is entitled “Road to Perdition” and shows a road heading nowhere—an interesting aesthetic when placed against the real backdrop of endless war.
ERRE possibly wanted to show that the fathers going off to kill in Iraq are hiding the truth of this ongoing murder from their sons here at home and that is what is perpetuating the killing. The next logical step is that the sons continue the legacy of “defending the motherland.” We’re on a Road to Perdition, as long as we are “cut adrift in [this] mythic, empty landscape” we call the borderlands. For the case of Mexico-US, the never-ending movement and energy that fuel the greater system also contribute to cutting through the land. In today’s
transorder artistic context it has been the contention that nature is being highly interrupted, creating a constant warzone, out of which have grown some beautiful reeds of art. These reeds know when they’re being stepped on, but they resist the storm winds with their flexibility and live to tell the truth about it. Lefebvre and spatial rethinking and questioning are applied here. ERRE’s pieces like *Road to Perdition* are highly flexible in that they are products of ERRE’s with and knowledge and experience of flexibility. Flexibility, in the language of art, translates to versatility. This is a strategy for finding channels of conceptual questioning of spaces through expressions and practices of transborderism. For example when ERRE was denied access to public urban space in Reading, he was not limited in imagination and technology, and this gave meaning to his exhibition. He placed the piece digitally in its originally intended location, creating dialogue about what war had to do with Bingaman Bridge.

Reeds, like art, find the spirit to grow just about anywhere, adapting to their surroundings and thrive with a specific purpose to provide the oxygen of meaningful practices to the glo-cal populace, placing heavy emphasis on what Lefebvre would call the emotive or what I call the experiential in the dimensions of spatiality. Mike Davis observes that Reading’s glo-cal populace consists of a greater percentage of Latinos each year, which indicates that there has been an important social factor, or belief contributing to local sensitivity and offense taken to the installation of his truth-to-power *Road to Perdition* piece, thereby questioning the objectivity and soundness of Reading’s decision to reject it.

ERRE’s intention could be interpreted in a number of ways. He questions reactions through the oral deconstruction of the elements of his piece. Instead of commenting on the piece itself, he raises questions about others’ appropriations and the inherent realities these appropriations may indicate:

> It is amazing that a piece like this is so universally considered offensive. After all, the billboard only itemizes events that in their time were celebrated as victories and praised as just causes. Are people outraged because a Mexican artist has bothered to highlight this history? Or do I perceive an underlying shame? (Ramírez ERRE, 2005).

As ERRE points out coming from “a Mexican perspective” carries a very different charge than when represented in context of a history textbook in an American school. Considering the public outrage *Road to Perdition* caused in Reading and the way the city became consumed by and united in rejecting it, it can be deduced that this imagined anti-monument
questioned its surrounding built environment without ever having to be installed. It brought the reminder of the peripheral effects of war to a historically colonial time-space and revealed conditioned subjectivities that hinder it from acknowledging the real consequences for others. Using the materials typically used for propaganda to pitch a sale of his own: let’s all be human for the rest of our lives—human enough to judge for ourselves instead of needing a band wagon or wolf pack to define us. To take control by lifting the veil of convenience off of the brutal truth of our physical destruction of the globe and our own backyard with all of this war abroad funding all of this war at home.

I echo ERRE by denouncing subsequent invasions across geopolitical borders. The erasure of possibilities of subjective experiences for others must never be tolerated, yet we are all living off of a machine that gets away with daily mass murders globally. After all of the sit-ins, the movements, the art, the tears, the pleading to stop the killing...after the trillionth blood drop falls, we continue. We continue this tradition of murder, because we are addicted to it indirectly through what has been framed as “the economy”. We are addicted to consumption funded by war. We are sick and medicated, because our fathers are sick and they’ve raised us just so, if they couldn’t imagine any other option. Our economy cleans up shop on quick-fix medication with sometimes horrific side effects—whatever you want—Prozac, Codeine, Ritalin, Demerol, Insulin, Xanax, Oxycontin, Morphine, Lithium, Ambien, Lunesta, Cialis, Levitra, Adderol, Boniva, Pitosin, grossly over-prescribed antibiotics, not to mention alcohol and narcotics. So naturally we spend our money on these drug cocktails and load up when the pain and stress is too deep to resolve. Buenas Noches.

But wait. Our leaders are sick and we have to do upkeep on the monster of a political nation-state that they created. The roots are rotting, pudriendose, and we need to purge.

In the spirit of spatial rethinking and questioning the limits on scope or reach of a México-US transborder subject, ERRE purged. The method was to leak universally known history textbook dates of American wars on a freeway sign. He purged the knowledge of that outward from his own experience of memory and onto the fringes of the spatial or physical level of the city. Just as we can choose to appropriate ourselves of realities, we can choose to disappropriate, project, or reject/resist ownership of realities or try to change them through the act of questioning.
CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, our instinctual internal reactions to the unnatural disconnect that borders create can be transformed into logical responses that help us transcend institutional limits and find our own transborder experiences. Art is a natural tool/language for reconfiguration of notions of identity, culture, and space—national boundaries in particular—because it questions all that it comes across.

Taking a closer look at ERRE’s work between 1994 and 2009 allowed me to see his noteworthy questioning of the Mexico-US border in three spatial domains. To say the very least Tijuana/San Diego is physically, conceptually, and experientially significant in the global context of borders. It goes without saying that to understand what borderlands means, one must cross borders that divide the physical and metaphorical borderlands. I understand the borderlands as a third space—one that welcomes anyone who dares to believe in it to use it as a platform for self-expression and agency, unlocking endless possibilities for social change and creative collective action.

ERRE would agree that understanding the Tijuana/San Diego border region calls for a deeper level of criticism and self-reflection of the transborder experience, one that can only be reached (legally or illegally) through creativity. By Lefebvre’s spatial triad, that names the three levels of space: the physical, conceptual, and experiential; the highest space and the most creative space is the third, that of the individual human experience. ERRE’s work shows us, if we want to see, that the experience is the rich paint we put on our own blank canvases of life, conceptually and physically invading our own inner and outer spaces with emotively charged expressions. We can choose to paint with imagination and critical purpose, or just paint what we have been taught to see, following in the footsteps of our disconnected past. We are “operationalizing” our lived experiences to run over the conceived and perceived limits and open the mental shackles of believe, vote, buy, or invest one way or
another with creational manifestations of our most high imaginations of love. It is important
to reflect upon the fact that each one of us is somehow the other.

For ERRE, who detonated illusions of the past and present with his transborder
stories, the media are mixed and many more than just paint. His installations in the specific
past, present and future spatial context of the Tijuana/San Diego borderlands, brings
culturally appropriate tools together with new ideas about the border, and documents intrinsic
narratives that speak for and naturalize the transborder condition. If installations are site-
specific, three-dimensional works designed to transform the perception of a space,”
installations Century 21, Toy an Horse, 187 Pairs of Hands, Sing Sing Love as a First
Language, Prejudice Project, Stripes and Fence Forever, Road to Perdition, Body of Crime,
and Eyes/ICE Tower transformed perceptions of the border. These productions forced us to
walk a mile in the shoes of our own inner others: poor, marginalized, illegal, working,
segregated, institutionalized, criminal, corrupted, and tired. ERRE’s pieces constitute a body
of work that takes a collective journey into better understanding the human soul’s experience
and re-conceptualizing its meanings in the current context of our constructed space.

If experience is how we interact with the space around us, then where does that place
the experience of dreaming? Dreams exemplify how experience is much more than just the
physical and conceptual realms of space. ERRE’s art translates his crazy dream of political
clarity, transparency, and reconsideration into a the experience of creating a 2-headed 40-foot
Trojan Horse standing at the most heavily trafficked border crossing in the world.
Installations like these invite one to join them in questioning the spatial practices and the
spaces of representation in Tijuana/San Diego. Recycling from the very by-products that
mark the bloody and poisonous effects of the unnatural border, ERRE and many others are
purposefully re-conceptualizing and re-living these spaces as representational spaces inspired
by the natural creativity of the human spirit.

Through his work, the mobile and globally conscious Marcos Ramírez ERRE
questions the flawed and unbalanced “givens” of power and privilege inherent to institutional
classifications and enforcements of metaphorical and geopolitical borders. Meanwhile, he
reminds everyday people who are often the others that it is in their agency and perseverance
that true power and privilege reside, the degree of power correlating with the degree of
inquisitiveness about the current situations happening around one locally and globally and
what role s/he plays in contributing to the greater questioning thereby reconstructing and
naturalizing the *transborder condition* as a limitless state of human opportunity. It depends,
furthermore on a level of creativity that transforms this opportunity of experience into an
internal art boom that when expressed, purges ill-effects of colonial metaphysical realities
therapeutically, bringing the subject into light through the power of the object s/he has so
celestially created. From my particular standpoint ERRE interests me in understanding the
*other* discourses and feelings at this border of the globe. It seems we could *all* stand to learn
something from the other.
REFERENCES


