

InSite-Specific: Three Art Projects on the Tijuana-San Diego Border Zone

Erandy Vergara-Vargas

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Art History

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada**

August 2008

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Your file *Votre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-45507-4
Our file *Notre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-45507-4

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ABSTRACT**InSite-Specific: Three Art Projects on the Tijuana-San Diego Border Zone**

Erandy Vergara-Vargas

Drawing from border theory and postcolonial studies, this thesis investigates the way narratives of borders and nation have been explored and contested in three art projects commissioned for inSite, a binational art festival focused on the Tijuana-San Diego border zone. The first case study focuses on Valeska Soares' *Picturing Paradise* (2001) to investigate the border as an ideological and physical construct that divides Mexico and the United States. The second examines Judi Werthein's *Brinco* (2005) to explore illegal border crossings and the action of "jumping" into the United States. The third case study looks at Gustavo Artigas' *The Rules of the Game* (2000) to propose a metaphor of the border dynamics of friction and coexistence.

This thesis exposes one of the most important characteristics of the border between Mexico and the United States, that being how the paradigm of the nation-state is structured to reinforce frontiers and dominant narratives of difference in order to legitimate and perpetuate social and economical divisions. This thesis challenges the nation-state paradigm and explores the connections between borders and illegal immigration in contemporary art.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Catherine MacKenzie and Dr. Cynthia Hammond for their support throughout my graduate studies. I am also extremely grateful to my advisor Alice Ming Wai Jim for her guidance and assistance. My sincere thanks to my readers Dr. Sherry Farrell Racette and Dr. Johanne Sloan for their critical commentaries. I would also like to thank Lynn Beavis. Special thanks go to the artists Gustavo Artigas, Valeska Soares and Judy Werthein, who inspired this research. Finally, I would like to thank my family for their unconditional love and support.

To my mother, Soledad Vargas Navarro

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF PLATES	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
InSite: Context and History	4
I. ON MIRRORS, ILLUSION AND EYES: VALESKA SOARES' PICTURING PARADISE	18
1.1. Solid but Transparent: Soares' Mirrors	19
1.2. Illusion and Paradise	26
1.3. From Cities, Eyes and Mirrors	29
II. THE ILLEGAL OTHER'S NEW SHOES: JUDI WERTHEIN'S BRINCO	36
2.1. Brinco: Design as Provocation	37
2.2. The Unhealthy and Misplaced Other: Media Response	42
2.3. Made in China: the Work of Art as Object of Desire	52
2.4. The Illegal Other's New Shoes	55
III. GUSTAVO ARTIGAS: THE RULES, THE GAME AND THE NATION	58
3.1. The Rules of the Game I: Can We Have Our Ball Back Please?	63
3.2. The Rules of the Game II: The Court and the Nation	67
CONCLUSION	74
BIBLIOGRAPHY	80
PLATES	92

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- fig 1. Valeska Soares. *Picturing Paradise*, 2000. View of the installation from Playas de Tijuana; one of the panels reflecting the bullring from San Diego.
- fig 2. Valeska Soares. *Picturing Paradise*, 2000. View of the installation from Playas de Tijuana.
- fig 3. Valeska Soares. *Picturing Paradise*, 2000. View of the installation from Border Field State Park.
- fig 4. Valeska Soares. *Picturing Paradise*, 2000. View of the installation from Playas de Tijuana.
- fig 5. Valeska Soares. *Picturing Paradise*, 2000. Image shot from Border Field State Park.
- fig 6. Valeska Soares. *Picturing Paradise*, 2000. Detail of *Picturing Paradise* reflecting a Border Patrol vehicle.
- fig 7. Judi Wertheim. *Brinco*, 2005. Poster.
- fig 8. Judi Wertheim. *Brinco*, 2005. Poster. Photo Alfredo De Stéfano.
- fig 9. Judi Wertheim at CNN, November 2005. Screen shot.
- fig 10. Judi Wertheim. *Brinco*, 2005. Sneaker distribution at the border.
- fig 11. Judi Wertheim. *Brinco*, 2005. Sneaker distribution at the border.
- fig 12. Judi Wertheim. *Brinco*, 2005. Launch of *Brinco* at Blends.
- fig 13. Gustavo Artigas. *The Rules of the Game I*, 2000. Image shot from Colonia Libertad, Tijuana, B.C., Mexico.

fig 14. Gustavo Artigas. *The Rules of the Game II*, 2000. Images of the court and public.

Video still.

fig 15. Gustavo Artigas. *The Rules of the Game II*, 2000. Simultaneous game between the soccer teams Jaguares and CETYS, and the two basketball teams from the Boys' and Girls' Club of San Diego. Video still.

Introduction

This thesis analyzes three art projects created on the border between Mexico and the United States. Drawing from border theory and postcolonial studies, I investigate the way narratives of borders and nation have been explored and contested in contemporary art practices. Specifically, I use the case study methodology to focus on the following three projects: *Picturing Paradise* (2001) by Valeska Soares, *Brinco* (2005) by Judi Werthein and *The Rules of the Game* (2001) by Gustavo Artigas; and incorporate interviews with the artists. These artworks were commissioned for inSite, a bi-national art festival organized by inSite and different non-profit and public institutions from Mexico and the United States.

The first chapter focuses on *Picturing Paradise*, an installation commissioned by inSite in 2000. At the San Diego-Tijuana border, Brazilian-born, New York-based Valeska Soares covered two sections of the border fence with stainless steel panels polished to a mirrored finish, and onto which she applied an excerpt from Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* in vinyl. In this chapter, I argue *Picturing Paradise* puts into motion a complex interplay between Tijuana and San Diego in three different ways: first, by creating the visual effect of transparency, the mirrors reconfigure the site and the site is reconfigured by the mirrors. Second, *Picturing Paradise* evokes illusion and mirage, thus suggesting a utopian paradise without a fence. And third, it exposes the connections and contradictions between Calvino's *Cities and Eyes I*, with the border cities of Tijuana and San Diego.

The second chapter examines the work of Argentinean artist Judi Werthein. For inSite 2005, she created *Brinco* (“Jump”), a line of sneakers designed for migrants intending to illegally enter the United States. The shoes came equipped with a compass, a flashlight, a secret pocket and a removable insole imprinted with a map of the border area of Tijuana and San Diego. In addition, each pair of shoes was accompanied by the label: “This product was manufactured by workers in China who were paid a minimum wage of \$42 per month and worked 12 hours a day.”

Brinco addresses notions of illegal immigration, sweatshop production, the fashion industry, and the intersection of these concepts with global economy. Furthermore, Werthein created a controversial art object that copied the transnational industries’ strategies of production, circulation and consumption. Werthein’s sneakers were specifically designed for immigrants who would become undocumented workers once in the United States, provoking media attention and vigorous public debate. In this chapter, I investigate how Werthein deploys the sneakers as a strategy and discuss her intervention into the Tijuana-San Diego area. My discussion is centered on three main arguments. First, I analyze the sneakers’ design in relation to illegal border-crossings. Second, I investigate the media’s response and commentary on the contradictory position of immigrants as Others. Finally, I propose that this project is a form of activism and discuss Werthein’s strategy of agitation.

The third chapter focuses on the work of Mexican artist Gustavo Artigas for the 2000-2001 edition of inSite. *The Rules of the Game [Las Reglas del Juego]* (2000) was structured in two parts: *The Rules of the Game I*, which consisted of the installation of a public handball court beside the Tijuana-San Diego border fence, and *The Rules of the*

Game II, which consisted of simultaneous sports matches between two basketball teams from the United States and two soccer teams from Mexico. The two matches were played at the same time, on the same court, with simultaneous commentary in English and Spanish. The aim of this chapter is to investigate how rules are structured in Artigas' games and how they relate to the concept of the nation-state.

Finally, in my concluding chapter, I establish the connections between the three case studies I have focused on, and discuss how *Picturing Paradise*, *Brinco* and *The Rules of the Game* expose one of the most important characteristics of the border between Mexico and the United States, that being how the nation-state paradigm is structured to reinforce frontiers and dominant narratives of difference in order to legitimate and perpetuate social and economical divisions.

The scope of my analysis is not limited to art history or art criticism. My research deploys postcolonial perspectives and border theory, as it is in these fields of knowledge that questions have been consistently posed on nationalism, borders and immigration.¹ Postcolonial theory and border theory are used to construct a critical framework for this thesis because the writing and my three case studies share common critiques of power, racism and exploitation, and scrutinize the multiple aspects that build and reinforce borders. The complex space of the border has been extensively theorized. My objective is

¹ One of the most influential elaborations on border theory is Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa. Her elaboration on borderlands as sites of difference and creativity and border crossings (of physical, ideological and cultural boundaries) as practices of resistance has set the basis of border theory. Accordingly, other writers have gone on to develop these ideas, for example Guillermo Gomez-Peña, "The Border Is (A Manifesto)," *Postcolonialism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*. vol. 1, ed. Dianna Brydon (N.Y: Routledge, 2000) 438-439; Gerald McMaster, "Border Zones: The 'Injun-uity' of Aesthetics Tricks," *Cultural Studies* 9.1 (1995) 74-90; Renato Rosaldo, *Culture & Truth: the Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989). In more current discourses, however, other authors have moved forward the prevailing assumptions of borders as spaces of freedom and transgression, and have discussed the relationship between borders and the notions of culture, home, nation, and power. See David E. Johnson and Scott Michaelsen, ed., *Border Theory: the Limits of Cultural Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 1-41.

to therefore draw from and expand these existing fields of inquiry to art history in my critical analysis of the select works.

My thesis will contribute to the field by providing a theoretically-informed analysis of artworks dealing with borders and consider the Tijuana-San Diego border zone as a site of intervention, analyzing how this site has been addressed and challenged by the work of Gustavo Artigas, Valeska Soares and Judy Werthein.

InSite: Context and History²

In order to position my three case studies in the Tijuana-San Diego art world, it is necessary to briefly introduce the agenda, structure, and curatorial framework of inSite. Here it is important to make clear that my purpose is not to trace the history of art practices in Tijuana and San Diego, but to elaborate the context of the art event in which my three case studies were created.³

² The name of the festival has been spelled differently on each edition; hereafter it will be referred to as it was spelled on the last edition: inSite.

³ Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to briefly mention that the artistic production of the Mexico-U.S. border region has been very active since the late 1960's. Although artists from both countries had worked there long before, the political art characteristic of the border zone and the Chicano movement were influenced by the civil rights movement and the social movements of the sixties. Chicano art emerged from this ideological context and engaged artists and intellectuals, who assumed an active role within the society as they sought to engage the community, thus creating an "art of the people." It is also important to mention that during the late 60's and 70's, numerous artistic and community centers emerged in border cities. In the early 80's, the term *border art* emerged: along with the militarization of the border between Mexico and the United States, artists from both sides of the border engaged in artistic practices that used the border as their working premise. For more references on the history of art on the Mexico-U.S. border see José M. Valenzuela A., "Forms of Resistance, Corridors of Power: Public Art on the Mexico-U.S. Border;" and Carolina Ponce de Leon, "Encounters and Disencounters: A Personal Journey through Many Latin American and U.S. Latino Art Worlds," both in Over Here: International Perspectives of Art and Culture, ed. Gerardo Mosquera and Jean Fisher (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004). Also see: Iris H.W Engstrand, et al., Culture y Cultura. Consequences of the U.S.-Mexican War 1864-1848 (Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 1998); Madeleine Grynstejn, "La Frontera/The Border: Art about the Mexico-United States Experience," La Frontera/The Border: Art about the Mexico-United States Experience (San Diego: Centro Cultural de la Raza, San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art, 1993); and Rachel Teagle, ed., Strange New World/Extraño Nuevo Mundo: Art And Design from Tijuana/Arte y Diseño Desde Tijuana (La Jolla, Calif.: Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, 2006).

InSite is a contemporary art festival focused on the Tijuana-San Diego area. Since its inception, the festival's structure, format and focus have significantly transformed and have adapted to different interests. InSite's first edition was organized in 1992 by Installation Gallery, an artist-run centre formed in the early 1980's in San Diego.⁴ From September to October 1992, inSite coordinated twenty-one museums, galleries and cultural centers from Tijuana and San Diego and featured around fifty artists from both countries. InSite sought to position itself as an event featuring installation and site-specific work, but the focus was not the "specificity" of the Tijuana-San Diego border zone per se. In fact, the structure, definition and agency were unclear, given the ignorance the American coordinators had of the art scene in Mexico and vice versa.

In its second edition in 1994, inSite grew and changed significantly, setting the basis of a bi-national event that drastically transformed the cultural scene of Tijuana and San Diego in the following years. That year, the organization and structure became more complex.⁵ With a budget of \$3.2 million, inSite ran from September until October in thirty-eight different venues such as the Centro Cultural Tijuana (CECUT), the Colegio de la Frontera Norte from Mexico, and the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) and the San Diego Museum of Art from the United States. The festival featured music, dancing, a bi-national education program and public lectures. Approximately one hundred artists participated, including a significant number from Mexico City such as Eduardo Abaróa,

⁴ In the early 1990's, an advisory group of Installation Gallery including curator Mark Quint, art historian Sally Yard and Ernie Silva came up with the idea of creating an art event featuring site-specific art, as the gallery was then at risk of disappearing. For a brief history, see Sally Stein, "Looking Backward and Forward: A Preliminary Historical Conversation about inSite," *InSite 05 [Situational] Public > Público [Situacional]*, ed. Donna Conwell and Osvaldo Sánchez (San Diego: Installation Gallery, 2006) 417-25.

⁵ Although the curatorial team was not specifically defined as such, there was a selection of participating artists from the Tijuana region. The process started with an open call for installation and site-specific projects in Tijuana, which were pre-selected by a committee formed with administrators from public institutions from Mexico. The twenty-two proposals selected were sent to a curatorial group from the United States. The final selection included nine projects by Mexican artists.

Abraham Cruzvillegas, Daniela Rosell, and Sofia Táboas. From the United States, participating artists include Nina Karavasiles, Allan Kaprow, Chris Burden, Johnny Coleman, Patricia Patterson, among others.⁶

One of the most important projects in 1994 was *Century 21*, by Marcos Ramírez “Erre.” The installation consisted of a small house built with cardboard and discarded materials such as tires, plywood and tarpaper on the Centro Cultural Tijuana’s plaza. Contrasting the institutional architecture, the little shack, typical of Tijuana’s poor neighborhoods, was a critique of the cultural institutions and the social contradictions within Mexico and also between Mexico and the United States. With this piece, Ramírez broke out into the Tijuana art scene. Also important was the participation of one of the most influential border art collectives, the *Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo* (BAW/TAF).⁷

As the event was taking shape the border issue was considered in the discourse surrounding the festival. Lynda Forsha, inSITE director in 1994 wrote:

To view inSITE one had to travel throughout San Diego, the sixth largest city in the US, across the world's busiest international border and then into Tijuana, the fourth largest city in Mexico. Along this epic journey we traversed two major

⁶ One of the issues raised in 1994 was the differences between the cultural institutions in Mexico and the United States, as well as the artistic practices in both cities. At that point Tijuana did not have art programs at the university level, and cultural administrators had no knowledge of the contemporary art practices - or site-specific projects - taking place on the other side of the border. See José M. Valenzuela A., “This is Tijuana: Pastiches, Palimpsests and Cultural Sampling,” *Strange New World/Extraño Nuevo Mundo: Art And Design from Tijuana/Arte y Diseño Desde Tijuana*, ed. Rachel Teagle et al. (La Jolla, Calif.: Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, 2006).

⁷ The BAW/TAF was established in 1984 by David Avalos, Victor Ochoa, Isaac Artenstein, Jude Eberhart, Sara-Jo Berman, Guillermo Gomez-Peña and Michael Schnorr. Through performance, video, installations, happenings, paintings, poetry and radio projects, the BAW/TAF transformed the history of border art. Numerous activities took place right at the border, challenging authorities from both countries. As Gomez-Peña explains: “If the U.S. border patrol came too close, we crossed to the Mexican side and vice versa. During some performances, we invited our audience to cross to the other side ‘illegally.’ We exchanged food and art food and art ‘illegally’...” Guillermo Gomez-Peña, *The New World Border. Prophecies, Poems & Loqueras for the End of the Century* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1996) 88.

cities with distinctly different and historically disparate cultures that share a common geography yet are separated by an aggressively fenced international border. This culturally rich and politically loaded environment inspired and challenged the artists who participated in inSITE94. The artists responded to the meaningful context at hand, transformed space, and integrated art into everyday reality. Their research, acute perceptions about their sites, and commitment to the project have added immensely to our region's cultural landscape.⁸

InSite's third edition was characterized by a shift in structure and organization. By 1997, inSite had become an independent binational organization with a consolidated administration, staff and budget of \$2 million. InSite also shifted towards the international biennial model. There was an international curatorial team consisting of Olivier Debroise from Mexico, Ivo Mesquita from Brazil, Sally Yard from the United States and Jessica Bradley from Canada. It turned thematic – "Public Space in a Private Time," and included established artists such as Vito Acconci, Kim Adams, Francis Alÿs, Rebecca Belmore, Andrea Fraser and Thomas Glassford. InSite then strove to develop a distinctive character given the historical context of the Tijuana-San Diego border zone. As such, the projects as well as the related programs shifted in focus to being a more active, interventionist investigation of public space.⁹

⁸ Lynda Forsha, "Foreword," *InSITE97: Private Time in Public Space: San Diego, Tijuana*, ed. Sally Yard et al. (San Diego: Installation Gallery, 1998). A resume of this text can be consulted online: <http://www.insite05.org/legacy/testweb/english/insite94-e.html#>.

⁹ As Krichman explains, "we aimed for a much clearer idea of how we could distinguish the project and make it more meaningful for this region." Krichman quoted in Stein, "Looking Backward and Forward: A Preliminary Historical Conversation about inSite," 422. Actually, the decision to undertake a program of artistic residencies, trips to the border zone and talks with the artists and curators became key for this purpose. In addition, educational programs and workshops were developed, including a two-month workshop for young artists from the region.

Remarkable projects from this edition include Francis Alÿs' *The Loop* (1997), a political gesture in which he refused to cross the border fence, instead traveling for more than one month from Tijuana to Mexico City, Panamá, Santiago, Auckland, Sydney, Singapore, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Seoul, Anchorage, Vancouver, Los Angeles, to finally arrive in San Diego. As a final "product," he presented a postcard with a map of the journey. Marcos Ramirez "Erre," on the other hand, presented *Toy and Horse* (1997), a thirty-three-foot tall wooded horse with two heads, one facing the United States and the other Mexico, installed between the crossing of the San Ysidro border. The metaphor of invasion was articulated with the bidirectional horse facing the two countries and the question of "who is invading whom" was also posed. This piece provoked an important discussion in the local press and became an icon of the Mexican-American border.

The next edition of inSite ran from October 13, 2000 to February 25, 2001. The curatorial team was composed of Ivo Mesquita, Susan Buck-Morss, Osvaldo Sánchez and Sally Yard. From a curatorial perspective, this edition's aim was to transcend the notion of the city as a large-scale gallery and move towards a laboratory model. As Sánchez explained: "In the laboratory model, not the object but the process is important. The role of the public shifts from audience to co-investigator. Institutions, no longer display cases, become co-laboratories. Rather than merely entering urban space, the works of artists reconfigure it."¹⁰ Accordingly, the programming time extended from ten weeks (1997) to

¹⁰ The residencies program was restructured and based in these ideas of process and laboratory. The artist-in-residence program included tours to San Diego and Tijuana, in which the focus was not "the exploration of sites for artists' projects," but was instead framed in a series of public forums between the community, the artists, the curators and guest speakers such as Latin-American theorist Nestor García-Canclini and American social theorist David Harvey. The purpose was to openly discuss the artists' projects, as well as the curators's conceptual framework, that is "the contemporary situation of this geographical region as an area of sociopolitical conflict and development and the potential role of cultural practice within this part of the world." Osvaldo Sánchez, "Fading Traces," *InSite 05 [Situational] Public > Público [Situacional]*, ed. Donna Conwell and Osvaldo Sánchez (San Diego: Installation Gallery, 2006) 126.

five months (2000-20001), and the geographical position of the projects and their different formats and processes challenged a clearly-defined art tour. According to Krichman, one of the executive directors: “there was simply no way to avoid disappointing a lot of people who were expecting a tour of sited works in the context of a singular event.”¹¹ Indeed, one of the most common critiques of inSite was about how the projects were spread all over San Diego and Tijuana. For example: “Everywhere becomes inSITE because the exhibition, finally, does not end when you walk out of a venue. Unless you’re going home, you’re still in inSITE, even if you’re on the freeway or waiting in the line to cross the border in order to get from one inSITE venue to another.”¹²

InSite welcomed more than thirty artists from throughout the Americas, especially Mexico and the United States, who mostly live and work in important art cities, such as New York and Mexico City, while only a few artists from the region were invited to participate. Notable projects from this edition were *The Cloud*, by Chilean Alfredo Jaar, which consisted of a cloud of a thousand balloons floating above the border as a commemorative action for illegal immigrants who died crossing the border. Also interesting was *MAMA*, by Mauricio Dias and Walter Riedweg. The project consisted of a two-sided compartment placed at the pedestrian crossing of the San Ysidro border. On one side, a video projection shows a group of illegal immigrants jumping over the fence; on the other, a video shows interviews with American customs agents talking about their dogs, immigrants, their mothers, as well as their definition of “territory” and “authority.”

¹¹ Krichman quoted in Stein, “Looking Backward and Forward: A Preliminary Historical Conversation about inSite,” 424.

¹² David Lewinson, “Jitterbuggy Adventure: a Trip Through inSITE’94,” *Artweek* 25 (20 Oct. 1994) 13.

Outside the boxes read: *Rituales Viciosos* (“Vicious Rituals”) on the former and “Motherland” on the latter.

InSite 2005 ran from August 26 to November 13, with Osvaldo Sanchez as artistic director. This edition was structured in four sections: *Conversations*, a series of lectures and workshops directed by art historian Sally Yard; *Farsites*, a museum exhibition held at both the San Diego Museum of Art and the Centro Cultural Tijuana¹³; *Scenarios*¹⁴; and *Interventions*, curated by Sánchez.

For *Interventions*, twenty-two projects by artists from thirteen countries were commissioned to engage with specific issues of the border area. According to Sánchez, special focus was put on two key elements: “that the work should involve active co-participation and that it should be of a processual nature.”¹⁵ *Interventions* sought to engage artists to create experiences and situations of public domain.¹⁶

One of the projects that called attention to the politics of this space and at the same time engaged with the community was *One Flew Over the Void* (2005), by Javier

¹³ InSite 2005 included for the first time a formal museum exhibition entitled *Farsites—Urban crisis and domestic symptoms in recent contemporary art*, curated by Adriano Pedrosa and a group of five adjunct curators included Santiago García Navarro, Julieta González, Ana Elena Mallet, Betti-Sue Hertz, Carla Zaccagnini, who focused on the cities of Buenos Aires, Caracas, Mexico City, New York and Sao Paulo. The exhibition featured the work of fifty-two international artists. See exhibition catalogue Julie Dunn and Adriano Pedrosa, ed. *Farsites: Sitios Distantes* (San Diego: Installation Gallery, 2006).

¹⁴ *Scenarios* was divided into three projects: *Tijuana Calling*, five on-line projects curated by Mark Tribe; *Elipsis*, a live video and sound event curated by Hans Fjellestad; and the *Transborder Archive*, a mobile unit with information regarding issues of migration, environmental issues, human rights, identity and women’s rights, as well as archives and collections along the two cities curated by Ute Meta Bauer.

¹⁵ Sánchez, in “Atopia,” *Journal* 4.33 (Oct. 2005). Also see an on-line resume at: www.insite05.org. Although not specified in the curatorial discourse, the process-laboratory is consistent with the international biennial model and the “laboratory paradigm” that has framed an important number of international art events in the last ten years. This model is characteristic for artist-in-residence programs, projects related to the “experience economy” of providing services and processes over objects.

¹⁶ For Sánchez: “To create experiences of public domain implies envisioning collective situations that generate new meanings for the social contract. It implies the production of circumstantial identities, movable contexts, and continuously negotiated space. It is to create – in an artistic sense – more ‘effective’ ways in which to turn the social friction/interplay between models, and the circumstantial negotiation of the uses of space and the zones of instability, into a process that reveals the vision of structure in its totality as a network.” Sánchez “Fading Traces,” 42.

Telles, who organized the hurling of a professional human cannonball over the Playas de Tijuana-Border Field State Park border. The performance was prefaced by a procession of patients from a local health center.

InSite's general structure and curatorial framework is consistent with some elements of contemporary international biennials. For example, the specificity of a place has been used to promote cities and locations, as well as to legitimate biennials' discourse and differentiate them from others.¹⁷ In addition, the commission of works functions accordingly and artists are expected to produce and/or perform in response to local contexts through artists-in-residences programs framed within the laboratory-process paradigm and the "experience economy."¹⁸ Indeed, inSite has promoted the uniqueness of the Tijuana-San Diego zone and has encouraged international and local artists to engage with the space. However, there are fundamental differences between most of the international biennials based on the "white cube" model and inSite. The most significant is that until 2005, inSite had rejected exhibiting art in a gallery or museum space, and had instead promoted *Interventions* within the Tijuana-San Diego area.

The title of the festival and the context in which it was created provides insight to the relationship between site-specific art practices and inSite.¹⁹ Although differently

¹⁷ In regard to the international biennial model, Elena Filipovic wrote: "Timeless, hermetic, and always the same despite its location or context, this globally replicated white cube has become almost categorically fixed, a private "non-place" for the world of contemporary art biennials." Elena Filipovic, "The Global White Cube," *The Manifesta Decade: Debates in Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe*, ed. Elena Filipovic and Barbara Vanderlinden (Cambridge, MA: MIT P. 2005) 67.

¹⁸ These ideas have also been discussed in light of French curator Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (2002). For current critique on Bourriaud see Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (Fall 2004) 51-79.

¹⁹ As Yard wrote in the 1992 inSite' brochure, this event was created in the context in which these kinds of practices proliferated in the U.S.' art scene: "From installations in interior spaces to environments in public places, postmodern art has come to act in the continuum that it shares with us, projecting the aspirations of such early utopian modernists as Piet Mondrian and El Lissitsky toward an art at the scale of the world it would change." Sally Yard, "InSITE92 History. Essay." *InSite History*. 26 Mar. 2001. 8 Oct. 2007. <<http://www.insite05.org/legacy/testweb/english/insite92-e.html>>.

articulated in each edition, the agenda and curatorial discourse of inSite has always been related to the context of the Tijuana-San Diego border zone. The aspect most relevant is that this border is a contentious and politicized site. It brings forward a consideration of the nation-state paradigm and the American expansionist policy, and it exemplifies global politics. The narratives of this border are related to the geographical territories it demarcates, the history of this division, as well as the experience of the groups that have been affected by it. The Tijuana-San Diego border has inspired artists from different countries and backgrounds to produce artworks that speak to some of these problematics. Certainly, the Mexico-United States border in general has been an attractive yet contradictory space that has gained the attention of artists, critics and curators alike. Although inSite's curatorial premise has been criticized through the years, projects such as *Brinco*, *The Rules of the Game*, *Toy and Horse*, among many others, have become emblematic of this festival and have positioned the artists in the international art circuit. On the other hand, it is important to note that the diversity of projects held during the sixteen-year history of inSite offers different perspectives of the Tijuana-San Diego border area. InSite has encouraged international and local artists to engage with the space, but not necessary with the politics of the space.

In the text "Nothing to Declare" presented at the inSite' *Conversations* in 2005, artist and activist member of the Raqs Media Collective Shuddhabrata Sengupta wrote:

[I]t is delightful, and strange, to come to a city that carries within itself the living proof of the ultimate artifice of borders. A city market by a ten-foot-high steel wall, rising out of the ocean assailed recently by fire, more often by the relentless urge of human beings to transgress circumscriptions of space, to escape the

circumstances of privation that are guaranteed and underwritten by precisely such fences, that enable the mobility of capital, and restrict the mobility of people.²⁰

The three case studies this thesis investigates call attention to specific features of this border. Although different in methodology, support and strategies, these projects address the Tijuana-San Diego border zone as a politically-charged space where the notions of *border* and *nation* clash and connect. These contradictory relations need elaboration, for borders *exist* because of the *imagined nation*.

Drawing from Benedict Anderson's influential Imagined Communities, the term "nation" is used here to refer to an imagined political community. "The nation is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."²¹ According to Anderson, the nation is imagined as a *community*, for despite its social disparities and exploitation, it is always conceived as horizontal. It is imagined as *limited* with "finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations," as well as *sovereign* for the symbol of freedom from the dynastic realm became the sovereign state.²²

The concept of "borders," on the other hand, refers to imaginary and physical limits based on historical relations that take place within a common territory, which contain social spaces of diversity and difference, and thus spaces of struggles and power relations. Although this notion implies a line of division, borders are long, wide and deep. They question the concept of nation as a homogeneous ideology inherent to a geographic

²⁰ Shuddhabrata Sengupta, "Nothing to Declare," InSite 05. A Dynamic Equilibrium: In Pursuit of Public Terrain (San Diego: Installation Gallery, 2006) 93.

²¹ Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: New York: Verso, 1991) 6.

²² *Ibid.*

space, and formally oppose the idea that a line can divide two different “worlds.” In fact, as Oscar Martinez states: “Borders simultaneously divide and unite, repel and attract, separate and integrate.”²³

Embedded within the concepts of nation and borders is the notion of the “state.” According to Chicano anthropologist Alejandro Lugo, the expansion of new imperialist colonialism, which Michel Foucault (1978) and Stuart Hall (1986) date in 1870:

[C]onstitutes a historical transition in the nature of the ‘State’ from a monarchical, dynastic body politic and its *subjects* to a ‘State’ (read nation/state) in which the *subjects* become *citizens*, and thus become loosely tied to the direct control of a centralized, lawlike apparatus; in this new political regime, individuals are indirectly monitored through the state’s *dispersal of power*.²⁴

This is relevant to the discussion of the Mexico-United States border, because the nation-state is the territorially-based system of filiations that establishes laws and borders, as well as allows and denies citizenship. Although borders and nations are arbitrary constructs, they are legitimated by a concrete reality, the nation-state.

This moves the discussion towards “nationalism” and “nationhood,” two concepts that need clarification. The idea of being a nation — nationhood — is the starting point of nationalism, which is the aspiration of a system of filiations held together via history, culture, language, and territory supporting the idea of a homogeneous and coherent community shared by all members of a nation. As Gellner asserts: “Nationalism is not the

²³ Oscar J. Martínez, Border People: Life and Society in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1994) 25.

²⁴ Alejandro Lugo, “Reflections on Border Theory, Culture and the Nation,” Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics, ed. David E. Johnson and Scott Michaelsen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 49.

awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist."²⁵ For example, diasporic formations in the United States are influenced by nationalist discourses, hence people from Mexico and other countries are deprived of particular rights and they are constructed as undesirable outsiders that threaten the American nation. This issue is expanded on chapters two and three, but for now it is important to understand the connections between the nation-state, the ascription of citizens and the construction of social and racial divisions.

Following this, the role of borders in the formation of the United States of America as an independent nation-state is crucial, because the "new America... isn't bounded by such borders so much as defined by them."²⁶ Accordingly, as geographer Joseph Nevins writes:

The boundary's evolution is inseparable from American nation-state building, with its intermittent territorial expansion and the associated redefinition of the boundary and its accompanying social relations... These developments are intimately intertwined with the evolution of Mexican in-migration, and the establishment of U.S. immigration controls and boundary policing along the country's southern divide with Mexico.²⁷

Furthermore, considering the current flow of capital and people and the way the nation-state has been dispersed in the global economy, it is essential to acknowledge the socio-historical context of the formation of this paradigm and to relate it to issues of

²⁵ Gellner quoted in Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

²⁶ Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt, "On the Borders Between U.S. Studies and Postcolonial Theory," *Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity and Literature*, ed. Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000) 7. According to Singh and Schmidt, Turner's influential Frontier informed the idea "that an ever-expanding frontier was a 'consolidating agent' to the nation state." See Frederick Jackson Turner's *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (1893).

²⁷ Joseph Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper: the Rise of the "Illegal Alien" and the Making of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary* (New York: Routledge, 2002) 15.

borders and border-crossings. For Lugo, “the border region and border theory can erode the hegemony of the privileged center by denationalizing and deterritorializing the nation/state and culture theory.”²⁸ Thus, he proposes to open the discussion of borders in order to consider not only the traditional notion of borderlands as sites of creative cultural production initially developed by Gloria Anzaldúa in 1987, but also as sites of lucrative manufacturing production.²⁹ Adding this dimension to my research has been very significant, as it situates the border zones in the context of globalization and economic relations.

The structure of this thesis is based on a narrative that crosses the border from south to north. The first chapter investigates the fence itself, as the ideological and physical construct that divides Mexico and the United States. Soares’ *Picturing Paradise* addresses the physical boundary in a direct, yet subtle intervention that re-configures the Tijuana-San Diego border zone, while problematizes the concepts of border and nation. Werthein’s *Brinco* deals with illegal immigration from Mexico into the United States, as well as the global economy. This project illustrates a complex economic system reinforced by the nation-state that seeks maximum exploitation of goods and people. Finally, Artigas’ project proposes a metaphor of the border dynamics of friction and coexistence. *The Rules of the Game* illustrates the relationship between the laws of the nation-state, narratives of citizenship, nationality, and race that have constructed differences between people living in border zones while everyday identities and social relations are negotiated and established within the same space.

²⁸ Lugo, “Reflections on Border Theory, Culture and the Nation,” 45.

²⁹ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands: The New Mestiza/ La Frontera* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987).

The selection of work and the approach of this research were originally inspired by Soares' *Picturing Paradise*. As Soares' mirrors directly take on the border fence, creating a false vision of an open section on the border between Tijuana and San Diego, this artwork motivated me to research on how the contradictions and connections between those two countries are articulated in contemporary art practices.

The territorial definition between Mexico and the United States, the right of citizenship and the institutional regimes of law are connected to the nation-state. The artworks *Picturing Paradise* (2001) by Soares, *Brinco* (2005) by Wertheim and *The Rules of the Game* (2001) by Artigas challenge this paradigm as a fixed concept in their explorations of the connections between borders, immigration and territory.

Chapter One

On Mirrors, Illusion, And Eyes: Valeska Soares' *Picturing Paradise*

This chapter focuses on the work of Valeska Soares.³⁰ For inSite 2000-2001, she created *Picturing Paradise*, which consisted of the installation of large reflective metal sheets on both sides of the border fence that divides Border Field State Park, San Diego, in the United States and Playas de Tijuana, Baja California, in Mexico. Soares covered two section of the fence with stainless steel panels polished to a mirrored finish, onto which were affixed the text *Cities and Eyes I*, from Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (1972), in vinyl. On the American side, the text was presented in English and an illegible version in Spanish, inverted as if in a mirror image; on the Mexican side, the Spanish text read normally and was reversed in English. This chapter argues *Picturing Paradise* puts into motion a complex interplay between Tijuana and San Diego in three different ways: first, by creating the visual effect of transparency, the mirrors reconfigure the site and the site is reconfigured by the mirrors. Second, *Picturing Paradise* evokes illusion and mirage, thus suggesting a utopian paradise without a fence. And third, it exposes the connections and contradictions between Calvino's text with the border cities of Tijuana and San Diego.

On October 13, 2000, *Picturing Paradise* was officially presented as part of inSite's inaugural weekend, remaining in place until the closure of the festival on

³⁰ Valeska Soares was born at Belo Horizonte, Brazil in 1957. She studied architecture at Rio de Janeiro and moved to New York in 1992, where she studied a M.F.A. and a Ph.D. in Arts. She currently lives and works in New York. She has explored themes such as gardens, mirrors, desire, intoxication, ideal spaces and human intervention in the construction of nature, landscape and paradise. Her influences are minimalism, and non-objective sculpture, as well as the Brazilian neoconcrete movement and its tradition of actively engaging the audience. Her work has been analyzed in terms of architecture, installation and sculpture.

February 25, 2001. During the installation of the mirrors, agents of the Border Patrol read Calvino's text and then ordered the following text to be included on the artwork's label:

This is the inSITE2000 project of artist Valeska Soares. The text presented on these metal panels has been chosen by the artists and does not reflect the opinions of the US Border Patrol of The State Park Service.³¹

Throughout her career, Soares has investigated constructed and ideal spaces. According to the artist: "There is always a close correlation between what people try to do physically in constructing a landscape and philosophy."³² She refers to different ideologies surrounding French and English gardens to explain that their construction is based on paradigms. I suggest there is a similar correlation in *Picturing Paradise* with the Tijuana-San Diego border zone. Discussed in the context of postcolonial literature and border theory, *Picturing Paradise* draws attention to the construction of ideal communities, thus the paradigm of the nation.

1.1. Solid but Transparent: Soares' Mirrors

Installed on the border fence, Soares' mirrors created the visual effect of transparency and symbolically made the boundary disappear. This effect significantly impacted both the mirror and the border. My aim is to analyze the material and conceptual characteristics of the mirrors in relation to the site of *Picturing Paradise* and to investigate how the border zone transformed the mirrors at the same time the mirrors reconfigured this space (fig 1).

³¹ Cecilia Garza and Osvaldo Sánchez, ed., *Fugitives Sites: inSite 2000-2001. New Contemporary Art Projects for San Diego-Tijuana* (San Diego: Installation Gallery 2001) 24.

³² Soares quoted in Vik Muniz, "Valeska Soares. Interview," *Bomb* 74 (2001) 48.

Regarding the material, this was not the first time Soares used mirrors. In fact, she has played with the reflecting properties of different surfaces to explore issues ranging from subjectivity and perception (*Vanity*, 1998), to mirage and paradise (*Pure Theatre*, 2004). *Vanity* was a pavilion made of wood on the outside. Inside, the floor was covered by square-foot pieces of colored foam, and the walls were mirrored to a height of two feet above the foam. Visitors inside the pavilion were unable to see their reflection in the mirrors, although other people in the space could. In 2004, Soares was invited to inaugurate the *Intersticios* (interstices) program at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Rufino Tamayo in Mexico City. For the open area in the wood surrounding the museum, Soares built a lake forty meters in diameter with acrylic reflective sheets, and a small glass arbor placed at one of the lake's extremes. Inside she placed a large-scale cake in form of a bed. Although subtle, this project entitled *Pure Theatre*, dealt with the idea of constructed spaces, creating a false paradise inaccessible to visitors.³³

According to Soares, mirrors contain a series of contradictions that appeal to her. On one hand, they embody “the idea of reflection, of distortion and representation... Each time I look in a mirror I am startled, because there is a distance between what I think I am and what I see.” On the other hand, she continues, “it is a material that looks translucent, but is more solid than the solids.”³⁴

Conceptually, mirrors also played a fundamental role in the construction of

³³ Soares also created *Untitled* (2004) for the collective show “Glass, Seriously” (Dorsky Gallery, NY), which consisted of a mirror with an excerpt from Italo Calvino’s *Cities of Desire 5* printed following a labyrinth path. In 2002 she created three pieces that dealt with mirrors, *Bibliography Mirror* and *Tonight*, (Pampulha Art Museum, Belo Horizonte) and the video installation *Détour* (Fortes Vilaça Gallery, São Paulo). See Rodrigo Moura, “Valeska Soares: Sculptures That Feel.” *Art Nexus* 2:50 (Sept./Nov. 2003) 52-56.

³⁴ Soares quoted in Hans M. Herzog, “Conversation with Valeska Soares,” *Seducções: Valeska Soares*, Cildo Meireles, Ernesto Neto (New York: Daros-Latinamerica, 2006) 38.

Picturing Paradise. Soares' original proposal, presented in 1999 to the curatorial team of inSite, required a literal transformation of the border fence. The installation, entitled *Something Borrowed*, proposed to cut a section of the border fence and turn it vertically. As the division between the two countries would be affected by the piece, she planned to create a circular fence around the original fence with one entrance on each country. In the initial phase, numerous meetings with the Border Patrol were necessary and, in the end, as the fence could not be altered, this project did not proceed.

At the same time, Soares was interested in illusionary and subjective borders. She visited Tijuana and San Diego for the first time in July 1999, and based on this experience she saw that the border cannot in and of itself prevent border crossings, because, as she explains, "what you realize when you are there is that the border is psychological, the physical object of the fence itself doesn't stop anybody. The border exists in your mind."³⁵ She goes on and comments how the Border Patrol uses technology to scan beyond the border, and so "what stops people is the psychological, the idea that on the other side of the fence there are people who will hunt them down and catch them."³⁶

Through the use of mirrors, *Picturing Paradise* creates the effect of transparency and at the same time addresses subjective borders. Just as the material had to be solid but transparent, and to "deal with the illusion of entry... or not entering,"³⁷ Soares decided to install two mirrors on the fence between Playas de Tijuana and Border State Field Park, where both territories fade into the Pacific. The dimensions of the panels were exactly the same as the fence. However, as the Border Patrol disallowed the fence to be modified, the

³⁵ Soares quoted in Muniz, "Valeska Soares. Interview," 50.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

mirrors on both sides were supported by metal structures installed close to the fence.

The location of Soares' mirrors on the border fence is very significant. The initial borderline between Mexico and the United States was established at Border Field after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, and although the territory of Mexico and the United States was delimited at that time, no physical barrier existed.³⁸ Soares' mirrors were installed on both sides of a monument that demarcates the territory of both countries, this section of the Border State Field Park is called the "Friendship Park" and it is the only section of the Mexico-United States fence that uses chicken wire (fig 2).

As Soares explains, symbolically, this space represents the transformation from an open border to a metal barrier:

Before the fence was built, it was an open border. It was so open that on the American side a park called the "Friendship Park" was created – no one goes there now. The monolith that you see has on its sides a line that marks the division between Mexico and the U.S. and the fence is placed exactly on that line.

In the past there was no fence...³⁹

Since the mirrors were installed precisely on the only transparent section on this

³⁸ While I do not attempt to elaborate the history of the Mexico-U.S. border, it is worth mentioning its creation has significantly impacted the social and economical relations of the border cities of Mexico and the United States, such as Tijuana and San Diego. The creation of the border fence between Mexico and the U.S. is part of a complex history of hostility and aggression, as the territory fought over during the Mexico-U.S. war (1846-1848) ended with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, with Mexico losing half of its territory to the United States. For this reason, the life of Mexicans as well as Native Americans totally changed as they "were either to die off, become immigrants in their own land, or become a separate, colonized, cultural space within the 'American' national body." Singh and Schmidt, "On the Borders Between U.S. Studies and Postcolonial Theory," 7. For more information on the history of the Mexico-United States border see Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1993); Dana Lindaman and Kyle Ward, "How Textbooks Around the World Portray U.S. History: The Monroe Doctrine and Manifest Destiny," ed. Paula S. Rothenberg *Beyond Borders: Thinking Critically About Global Issues* (New York: Worth Publishers, 2006) 44-57.

³⁹ Valeska Soares, Personal Interview, 7 July 2008.

border, the installation produced a remarkable effect. Beside the monument that states the limits of Mexico and the United States, the two mirrors created the visual effect of transparency, and transformed the fence into something permeable. Hence, the border zone also reconfigured the mirrors because, installed on the fence with the same dimensions as the actual barrier, the stainless steel panels did not seem to reflect but to fade into the background, and since the background is the territory of a different “nation,” the mirrors reconfigure the site as well.

In the Tijuana and San Diego area, where the landscape is literally cut by the fence, the words *transparency* and *permeable* are of immense significance for two main reasons. First, the physical border fence does exist, and although some sections are of chicken wire and therefore almost transparent, the boundary itself has a strong presence. The border between Mexico and the United States runs from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico. It is approximately 1,954 miles long and extends across urban areas, deserts, mountains and rivers. Between California, in the United States and Baja California, Mexico, the fence extends 141 miles. Second, the border fence implies division, and at the same time restriction and surveillance. Not only is the frontier patrolled, there is also a system of identification, investigation, recognition and control of those who attempt border-crossings. Unlike American citizens who can visit Mexico freely, every Mexican needs an American Visa to step onto U.S. territory.

Picturing Paradise is a mirror made in solid material that symbolically makes two sections of the fence disappear. It is something solid but transparent that creates a false entrance to a restricted area, policed by the Border Patrol with surveillance cameras, infrared thermal imaging systems, night-vision devices and other technologies. Creating

this apparent gap, Soares' installation questions whether the fence divides one nation from another, thus troubling the very notion of border and exposing it as an arbitrary construction legitimated by regimes of power articulated through the discourse of the nation-state.

As defined by sociologist Avtar Brah, borders are:

[A]rbitrary dividing lines that are simultaneously social, cultural and psychic; territories to be patrolled against those whom they construct as outsiders, aliens, the Others; forms of demarcation, where the very act of prohibition inscribes transgression; zones where fear of the other is fear of the self; places where claims to ownership –claims to 'mine', 'yours' and 'theirs' – are staked out, contested, defended, and fought over.⁴⁰

As such, Soares' mirrors point to a contradictory border. Physically the border that divides Mexico and the United States does not halt immigration and border-crossings from south to north, as she points out: "It's funny, the border itself is unassuming. It's made of secondhand metal pieces from the Gulf War and chicken wire. There is not sense that it would stop anybody who really wanted to from crossing it."⁴¹

Furthermore, from a theoretical perspective, a border fence cannot divide two different worlds with completely different people living on each side; what lies "outside" and "inside" are not coherent human-beings⁴² defined in function by the territory delimited by a fence. The border is in fact a construction that maps the limits of an imagined nation. Thus the statement made by Soares' work is symbolic. Just as the

⁴⁰ Avtar Brah, "Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities," *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London; New York: Routledge, 1997) 198.

⁴¹ Soares quoted in Muniz, "Valeska Soares. Interview," 50.

⁴² Iris M. Young, "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference," *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990) 302.

frontier is troubled so is the nation and by fading the fence into another country's landscape, she reveals the "nation as imagined community." As defined by Anderson: "The nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings."⁴³

Nations are empirical sociological categories, imagined as unchanging and homogenous, while the desire for homogeneity is thought of as being limited to its territorial and social spaces.⁴⁴ Interestingly, the border contradicts the concept of nation and at the same time reflects the desires of a nation. As postcolonial scholar Abdul JanMohamed suggests, the border functions as a mirror defining the identity and ideology of the group that has created it.⁴⁵ *Picturing Paradise* functions in this manner: Soares' mirrors reflect the desires of two ideologies and the limits of their imagined nations lie precisely on this fence.

The border between Mexico and the United States maps the terrain of both countries, delimiting the homelands of Mexicans and Americans. It divides poor from rich, third from first world, non-white from white, "us" from "them." Most importantly, the border fence stands as authoritative as the nation that has constructed it—it is unquestionable, absolute. By reflecting both nations and putting into motion these absolute binaries, Soares makes a powerful statement about nations, as it questions the dangers of its legitimacy.

⁴³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.

⁴⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994) 201.

⁴⁵ Abdul R. JanMohamed, "Worldliness-Without-World, Homelessness-As-Home: Toward a Definition of the Specular Border Intellectual," *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*, ed. Michael Sprinker (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1992) 103.

According to JanMohamed, borders are articulations of differences, and those differences “tend to reify analog relations into imaginary identities and oppositions.”⁴⁶ In a critical essay on Edward Said’s formulation on the “specular border intellectual,” JanMohamed advises: “Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond necessity or reason.”⁴⁷ Because borders are neither inside nor outside, but hypothetically designate the differences between two different spaces, *Picturing Paradise* reflects and troubles the Tijuana-San Diego metal fence and reveals the nation as a utopian construct.

1.2. Illusion and Paradise

Picturing Paradise is a suggestive statement of both illusion and mirage. By covering two sections of the metal fence with mirrors, *Picturing Paradise* suggests that the border fence between Mexico and the United States is a metaphor, as in itself it does not stop illegal immigration.⁴⁸ However, and as Brah warns us, “far from being mere abstractions of a concrete reality, metaphors are part of the discursive materiality of power relations. Metaphors can serve as powerful inscriptions of the effects of political borders.”⁴⁹

Soares addresses this metaphorical border by creating two openings that from the distance may seem blurry, like a mirage. This is an important point as her intention was

⁴⁶ JanMohamed, “Worldliness-Without-World, Homelessness-As-Home: Toward a Definition of the Specular Border Intellectual,” 104.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁴⁸ Soares explains: “At the time that I was working around that area the border was made with material from the Gulf War and chicken wire. It’s very subjective in a way because physically anybody can jump that fence, it’s like the easiest thing to do... Actually, the real border is within Mexican territory, I don’t know, may be about 30 meters, or 100 meters, this is where all the technical apparatus of the Border Patrol are focused on. They can see with heat signatures where people are hiding, they’re not actually looking at that fence, they looking behind the fence, so the border in itself is a subjective idea. Where is it? It is not there exactly, but it creates this idea of a barrier, an idea of an impossibility than anything else... because physically the border fence doesn’t do anything.” Soares, Personal Interview, 7 July 2008.

⁴⁹ Brah, “Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities,” 198.

to focus on the psychological nature of this border. As she explains: “Anything you do there could rectify the idea of the border. So I thought I’d play the rectification to the limit by creating something more solid than what is already there. But at the same time, is a sort of a mirage.”⁵⁰ The idea of *mirage* thus becomes fundamental to this work. A mirage is an optical illusion, something that appears real but is not.

The reference to mirage also puts into motion another concept central to Soares’ discourse. She talks about illusion, and together illusion and mirage bear some relationship to the title. On the border zone that divides San Diego and Tijuana, a mirage would reflect a complex history and parallel stories affected by the border. The pedestrians encountering Soares’ “entrances” would inevitably think of a *possibility*. They know Mexico and the United States are divided by the fence, that crossing from south to north is restricted. As they know there are no entrances on this border, they recognize the mirror, and yet, at the same time, perceive it as mirage (fig 3). Thus the illusion of openings in the border become metaphoric of hope. Indeed, in Spanish the word *ilusión*⁵¹ (“illusion”), has different meanings, one of which is “hope,” a definition clearly relevant to Soares’ work.

Soares has stated the border itself is a subjective idea because “it creates this kind of idea of a barrier, idea of an impossibility.”⁵² Thus *Picturing Paradise* opens up, at least symbolically, a sense of possibility. As art critic Rodrigo Moura wrote: “These ‘mirrors’

⁵⁰ Muniz, “Valeska Soares, Interview,” 51.

⁵¹ Ilusión: 1. f. Concepto, imagen o representación sin verdadera realidad, sugeridos por la imaginación o causados por engaño de los sentidos. 2. f. Esperanza cuyo cumplimiento parece especialmente atractivo. Diccionario de la Lengua Española, (Real Academia Española: Madrid: España, 2001).

⁵² Soares, Personal Interview, 7 July 2008.

widened our view of one side, creating the impression that both countries overlap, and thus through illusion her work expanded the border."⁵³

Picturing Paradise's suggestive title raises some questions. For example, which paradise? Or what would a paradise be like on the border between Mexico and the United States? As she explains: "That is the whole issue we don't know, right? For me it was playing with the idea of paradise being this place where there are no borders, it has this utopian quality which we put on it... So it was kind of a suggestive and ironic title and it was meant to pose questions."⁵⁴ As the metal barrier extends westward onto the beach and fades into the Pacific's horizon, Soares proposes one version of paradise: a landscape where the horizon is not divided. This recalls an interesting contradiction - earlier I argued *Picturing Paradise* questions the utopian nation, I propose now that by doing so it evokes a utopian paradise (fig 4).

The relation to utopia is embedded in the title and the artwork itself. Soares' mirrors produce *only* an optical illusion, because as a legitimate structure of division and control to the American nation, the border cannot be open to Mexico. It is in this context the suggestion of paradise represents an interesting statement of utopia. Indeed, *Picturing Paradise* may reflect a positive desire: the illusion of openings in the border between Mexico and the United States. This utopia, however, may be only for people living on the Mexican side. On the contrary, from the American side, the utopian wish may be embedded in the discourse of the nation-state, seeking global economic expansion while reinforcing borders and restricting immigration.

⁵³ Moura, "Valeska Soares: Sculptures That Feel," 54.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

1.3. From Cities, Eyes and Mirrors

Literature has played an integral part in Soares' work. She has investigated, drawn from, quoted, and included texts and bibliographical references, throughout her artistic career.⁵⁵ With respect to *Picturing Paradise*, Italo Calvino's writing holds strong value. My purpose here is to investigate the connections and disparities between the two cities described by Calvino and the two cities addressed by Soares.

Calvino's "*Cities and Eyes 1*," from his book *Invisible Cities* (1978), narrates the story of two cities living side-by-side, reflecting and looking at each other in deep relationship without love. In fact, it describes a complex interplay between a city and its mirrored image on a lake. Calvino's two Valdradras are tied together through the mirror; their narratives and dynamics are deeply related to the reflected images, as the inhabitants live under a continuous gaze. Paradoxically, the mirror represents resemblance and contradiction; its same and its opposite. "The twin cities are not equal, because nothing that exists or happens in Valdrada is symmetrical: every face and gesture is answered, from the mirror, by a face and gesture inverted, point by point."⁵⁶

In Soares' installation, using the quote from Calvino alludes to the relationship between Tijuana and San Diego, as both cities represent each side of a historic dichotomy defined by the border fence. For the artist, Calvino's text speaks to the border zone. As

⁵⁵ For example, her installation *Historias* (1998), consisted on a bibliography listing of titles with the word "garden" that were engraved in copper bands attached to eighty trees of the Commons, Metrotech Center in Brooklyn; *Bibliography Mirror* (2002), done in collaboration with Brazilian curator Adriano Pedrosa, consisted of a mural-scale grid of mirrors engraved with book titles containing the word "mirror"; and *Untitled* (2004) derived from Soares' previous work *Détour*, consisted of a mirror in which an excerpt from Italo Calvino's *Cities of Desire 5*, was printed following a labyrinth form.

⁵⁶ Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (Trans. William Weaver. New York: Harvest Book, Harcourt, 1978) 33.

she explains: “instead of talking about politics is more about talking about love and hate between people.”⁵⁷

Calvino’s two Valdradras exist side-by-side, just as Tijuana and San Diego do. Whatever happens to one impacts the other and their histories are tied together: the wars for the territory, the construction of the border fence, the social inequalities, the impact of migration and the politics of anti-immigration, the mutually dependent economies - these are all important aspects setting a complex history poetically evoked in Calvino’s words. However, the use of this text needs to be scrutinized.

On one hand, Calvino’s *Invisible Cities* is inspired by Venice, thus the connections to the border cities of Mexico and the United States are distant. Although Tijuana and San Diego share much in common and their economies are dependant, there are important social inequalities and racial conflicts articulated in their respective narratives of difference and exclusion. There are, however, formal comparisons that can be made between Calvino’s two cities and Tijuana and San Diego. First, “Cities & Eyes 1” recalls surveillance and the gaze, both endless conditions in the Tijuana-San Diego zone, where the Border Patrol scans and patrols the territory around the fence twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. In Calvino’s narrative, the eyes symbolize a constant reminder of being observed, and thus actions and behavior are influenced, if not defined by this condition (fig 5, 6). In the border area, the desire for control goes beyond the fence. Surveillance is embedded in the discourse of the nation-state, and in the specific case of the United States, border security has been reinforced after the September 11 bombing of the World Trade Center in 2001. Essentially, surveillance is one of the main

⁵⁷ Soares, Personal Interview, 7 July 2008.

conditions of colonial power, but as the division between inside and outside is determined in terms of security, the border plays a fundamental role.

Borders are strategically used to keep people in and out, and to mark “the ending of a safe zone and the beginning of an unsafe zone.”⁵⁸ Consider for instance, how the media addresses issues of illegal immigration based on the idea of national security. The most commonly heard discourses against Mexican and Latin American immigrants in the U.S. media are “that ‘illegals’ pay no taxes (a patently false claim), contribute to the flow of U.S. dollars out of the country, and take jobs from U.S. citizens.”⁵⁹ This is relevant for surveillance policies articulate by means of economic and political control beyond the fence. Soares explains:

To the other side, you know, psychologically they want to have control, kind of a continuity situation to see what other people are doing on the other side of the border, which is not their business, you know.[...] So I guess that the border is not defined by the physical fence because it extends much more than that. And I mean, also like in their gaze, you know if you look at the Border Patrol just sitting over there, they have like telescopes, so the border to them extends far beyond the actual fence because they start controlling from far beyond.⁶⁰

A second comparison concerns how Calvino’s final statement — “The two Valdradas live for each other, their eyes interlocked: but there is not love between them.” — takes an interesting turn when discussed in terms of economical and social inequalities in the Mexico-United States border. It has been mentioned before that historically, the

⁵⁸ Morales quoted in Lugo, “Reflections on Border Theory, Culture and the Nation,” 43.

⁵⁹ Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper*, 113. See chapter 3 for an insightful analysis of the development of the “illegal aliens” in U.S. discourse.

⁶⁰ Soares quoted in *Fugitives Sites: inSite 2000-2001 New Contemporary Art Projects for San Diego-Tijuana*, ed. Cecilia Garza and Osvaldo Sánchez (San Diego: Installation Gallery, 2001) 27.

Tijuana-San Diego border area has represented a space of struggle and resistance from both countries. As Soares saw it, “the first thing was the mirror, because it came from *Something Borrowed*, and then the Calvino’s text just fitted and it gave it another layer. A kind of poetic subjectivity of love and hate, and a looking at one another that I thought complemented the piece.”⁶¹ In my view, however, the use of Calvino’s text “politicizes” Soares’ artwork instead.⁶² Despite the fact that Tijuana and San Diego share much in common, and both cities are economically dependent, the economic development takes place only on one side of the border. As art critic Berin Golonu comments reading *Picturing Paradise*:

The maquiladoras (assembly plants) that have recently sprung up in this region have been a huge draw for Mexican laborers and have created a zero percent unemployment rate in Tijuana. People from all over Mexico migrate to this region in search of jobs. Unfortunately, working in the maquiladoras is a grueling occupation, and the wages very low. As the cost of living in Tijuana rises along with the city's rapid development and growth, the wages gained by workers in the maquiladora industry don't suffice, keeping the workers and their families at poverty level.⁶³

Embedded in Golonu’s comments are issues of economic and political power between Mexico and the United States. The impact of the NAFTA agreement, for instance, has proved to widen the economic gap instead of improve the life of people

⁶¹ Soares, Personal Interview, 7 July 2008. For details on *Something Borrowed*, see page 21.

⁶² I consider this in light of Hal Foster, for whom “to conceive the project of political art it is necessary not only to grasp the connection between these two displacements in class and production, but also to relate them to a third (contested) displacement: from a theory that power is based on social *consent*, guaranteed by class or state ideology, to a theory that power operates via technical *control* that disciplines our behavior (and our bodies) directly.” Hal Foster, “For a Concept of the Political,” *Recordings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1985) 144.

⁶³ Berin Golonu, “Viewpoint,” *Artweek* 32:2 (Feb. 2001) 28.

from both countries.⁶⁴ In fact, what is important to acknowledge are the contradictions between the limited role of poor countries to production and assembling - for instance the maquiladora industry of Tijuana - as opposed to the economic development and profit of multinational companies and First World countries such as the United States

The love-hate relationship also relates to nationalist discourses constructed in terms of otherness. *Picturing Paradise* connects the ideal of community defined by feminist scholar Iris M. Young, to the subjective construction of otherness at the border fence between Tijuana and San Diego.⁶⁵ Soares talks about her work as being related to the politics of the self and subjectivity:

I am interested in subjective borders, the limits that you impose to yourself and how illusionary they are. I've also been dealing with ideas of reflection and distortion, how you think things are and how you see them, and what gets distorted between those two perceptions. [...] I thought perhaps there was a similar fluctuation of perception in the Tijuana/San Diego area. People who live very close to one another think of themselves and one another in particular ways, but in reality, distort and reflect one another simultaneously.⁶⁶

Nationalisms are based on imagined constructions of the self and the others; citizens within a country imagine themselves as part of a whole, and imagine people

⁶⁴ See Alejandro Lugo, *Fragmented Lives, Assembled Parts: Culture, Capitalism, and Conquest at the U.S.-Mexico Border* (University of Texas Press, 2008). Also see David Bacon, *The Children of NAFTA: Labor Wars on the U.S./Mexico border* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2004).

⁶⁵ Drawing from Derrida's deconstructive method, Iris M. Young argues that the ideal of community exhibits what Derrida calls "metaphysics of presence." According to Young, the metaphysics of presence is a formulation centered on the idea of totality; it is a desire to believe things as part of a whole, and therefore denies and represses difference. As this desire "generates a logic of hierarchical opposition" - the one and its other - the identity of the former is defined only in relation to the later. As Derrida's method of deconstruction shows, "with a concept or category what it claims to exclude is implicated in it." Young, "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference," 304.

⁶⁶ Soares quoted. in Muniz, "Valeska Soares. Interview," 50.

living beyond political borders as *totally* opposed. But in fact what they do, as Soares points out, is to reflect themselves.

This *double* reflection is explored in Soares' *Picturing Paradise* for the mirrors reflect passers-by who stand in front of them and at the same time reflect their idea of others. In the border between Tijuana and San Diego, these subjective constructions have important implications on a discursive and political level, since in nationalist assumptions the definition of the other is always constructed negatively in relation to the self. Master narratives of difference and exclusion, explained by Bhabha in terms of "colonial mimicry" as "*almost the same but not quite*," are exposed here.⁶⁷ Although historically dependant, there are important social inequalities between Mexico and the U.S. articulated in coercive ways that keep them "different."⁶⁸

The relations of "love and hate between people" that Soares sought to address call into question issues of the postcolonial Other. As differences between countries are given for granted, so are the ideals of filiations and common believes, the utopian nation and its citizens.⁶⁹ The main problem is that the nation is imagined as unchanging, unaffected by time and space, and this negation of "outside" influence and social interaction contradicts the very foundation of the American nation, despite it being populated and built by immigrants.

Soares exposes the contradictions of the nation-state and troubles the construction of Otherness. *Picturing Paradise* evokes a utopian desire for open borders, and yet at the

⁶⁷ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 122.

⁶⁸ Singh and Schmidt, "On the Borders Between U.S. Studies and Postcolonial Theory," 8.

⁶⁹ Here, it is worthwhile to mention Fredric Jameson's discussion of some of the problems in approaching utopias with "positive expectations" because although they offer visions of "happy worlds," this approach is based on the search for a one single solution "to all our ills" and can become "so self explanatory that [it] will compel universal conviction." Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: the Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London; New York: Verso, 2005) 24.

same time, the mirrors merge the two spaces and show that the border between Mexico and the United States divides as well as connects.

From within this context of the constructions of the Other, the next chapter analyzes *Brinco*, a controversial art object that connects issues of illegal immigration and border-crossings with the global economy.

Chapter 2

The Illegal Other's New Shoes: Judi Werthein's *Brinco*

The act of crossing the border between Mexico and the United States is popularly known as *brinco*, from the Spanish verb *brincar* – “to jump”. The term, however, is not limited to the action of jumping the fence, as the process of border-crossing involves a long journey into inhospitable terrain with mountains, rivers and deserts that migrants from South and Central American countries must cross to get to the United States. Based on this journey, Argentinean artist Judi Werthein⁷⁰ created an art object for immigrants to wear: a limited edition of sneakers adapted to satisfy some of their needs as they cross into U.S. territory.

For inSite 2005, Werthein trademarked *Brinco* (“Jump”), a sneaker line that copied the strategies of design, production and distribution used by transnational sports gear companies. *Brinco* addresses notions of diaspora, the work force, illegal immigration, as well as the intersection of these concepts in the global economy. Basically, Werthein created a controversial art object that connects the art market with illegal immigration in the United States and sweatshop production in China. The project consisted of three components: first, the sneakers were distributed at the border fence among undocumented migrants who intended to cross the border; second, they were given away at the Casa del Migrante, the Casa de la Madre Asunta, and the Casa YMCA

⁷⁰ Judy Werthein was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1967 and completed a MA in Architecture at the Universidad de Buenos Aires (1993). Since 1997 she has lived in Brooklyn, where she has taught as a visiting artist at the Cooper Union University, School of Art, and the Bard College School of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson. Using different projects and strategies, Werthein has emphasized the importance of the relationship between audience and artwork, and has focused on institutional critique and social disparities, although her work is not restricted to these issues. She has also created site-specific projects and interventions that seek to engage the active participation of visitors.

de Menores Migrantes-Tijuana—all non-profit organizations that help deported migrants; and third, the sneakers were simultaneously sold as limited-edition art objects in an expensive boutique in downtown San Diego for \$215 per pair.⁷¹

Werthein' sneakers were specifically designed for illegal immigrants who would become undocumented workers once in the United States, an act that garnered huge media attention and provoked vigorous public debate. The objective of this chapter is to explain how Werthein deployed the sneakers as a strategy and to discuss her intervention into the Tijuana-San Diego area as activism. My discussion is centered on three main aspects: first, I analyze the sneaker design in relation to the users' needs, discussing some of the conditions of illegal border-crossing in the Tijuana-San Diego area and connecting them to the design and production of *Brinco*. Second, I investigate the media's response and the surrounding public debate in relation to what sociologist Avtar Brah calls the "paradox of the undocumented workers," and to what geographer Keld Buciek defines as "the unhealthy and misplaced other." To conclude, I propose that this project is a form of activism and discuss Werthein' strategy of agitation.⁷²

2.1. *Brinco*: Design as Provocation

Brinco's design played a fundamental role, not only as utilitarian sneakers for illegal immigrants, but also as an art object addressing the complex intersection of migration, labour flow, manufacture competition, consumerism and the fashion industry

⁷¹ Initially, *Brinco* were sold at *Blends* (San Diego) and *Printed Matter* (Manhattan).

⁷² I want to make clear that the scope of Werthein's project makes it necessary for me to narrow down my analysis to issues of illegal immigration and the experience of Mexican and Latin American Diasporas in the United States. Therefore, fundamental aspects such as the wage differential and sweatshop production in China were not discussed in-depth. For further discussion on these issues, see Robert J. S. Ross, *Slaves to Fashion: Poverty and Abuse in the New Sweatshops* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004); and Byron Miller, "Globalization, Sweatshops, and Glocal Organizing," *Antipode* (36: 4 Sep. 2004).

in the Tijuana-San Diego area. The design strategy of provocation had an impact on the art project itself, because the controversial media attention garnered empowered the discussion of the issues Werthein sought to address. I argue that while Werthein did indeed design a controversial art object that generated important discussions in the mass media and public forums on the Internet, it was not only the design but also the process and distribution of the project that came together and literally *provoked* the media.

Werthein's project started as a response to the invitation of curator Osvaldo Sánchez for inSite 2005. In what can be considered the in-process curatorial premise entitled *Bypass*, Sánchez wrote:

[*Bypass*] strives to stimulate novel experiences of public domain and the implementation of alternate modes of citizenship... inSite_05's artistic essence will reside primarily in revising the suitability or pertinence of certain captivating, heuristic, and symbolic strategies that historically have been approached through art and which still constitute what we understand as artistic. [...] the overarching challenge in inSite_05 is to empower each project to suborn, clone, and de-institutionalize these artistic strategies, in order to re-inscribe them as breathtakingly innovative creative experiences with broad anthropological significance. Only in this way can we contribute new channels for the cultural flows that now converge via myriad streambeds to make up the urban social fabric.⁷³

Werthein was part of the first residency of the *Interventions* program that ran from September 29 to October 6, 2003. The initial activities included group and

⁷³ Sánchez quoted in Joshua Decter, "Transitory Agencies and Situational Engagements: the Artists as Public Interlocutor?," *InSite 05 [Situational] Public > Público [Situacional]*, ed. Donna Conwell and Osvaldo Sánchez (San Diego: Installation Gallery, 2006) 293.

individual trips to Tijuana and San Diego, as well as talks with academics from both sides of the border. Werthein also took part in the second residency, from April 25 to 30, 2004, during which she visited the Salk Institute and Koch Laboratory in Pasadena to talk to different scientists and also met with fortunetellers, shamans and healers on both sides of the border. In April 2004, Werthein presented an initial proposal on consciousness. However, as the project unfolded in the subsequent months, she decided to submit an alternative final project in December 2004: “The proposal involved the creation of a limited-edition U.S.-Mexico border crossing shoe that would be produced in China, distributed free of charge to undocumented migrants and sold as an ‘art object’ in a fashionable shoe boutique.”⁷⁴

Once the project was defined, Werthein devoted herself to additional research and fieldwork. From January to May 2005, she conducted research on immigration and, in May 2004, she met and interviewed *coyotes* (smugglers), undocumented migrants, activists, aid workers, anthropologist and academics when she traveled to Tijuana for the third time. Werthein’s research enabled her to identify the key elements needed for the long journey on foot from Mexico to the United States. First, she identified the contrasting target groups she wished to reach: people from Mexico and other Latin American countries intending to cross the border, and fashion and art consumers living - or shopping - in San Diego. Second, she identified the challenges: as migrants have to hide from the Border Patrol and other American security agencies (such as the civil organization the Minute Man Project), they must avoid urban centers and the fortified fence, relegating themselves to the deserts and mountains, where they walk for long hours, often at night.

⁷⁴ Conwell and Sánchez, eds., *InSite 05 [Situational] Public > Público [Situacional]*, 63.

The result was *Brinco*: an ankle-high sneaker, mainly green, with some elements in red, white and black, and finer details embroidered in yellow. The design included an American eagle embroidered on the forepart; a mini compass and flashlight with a clip to attach them to the red shoelaces; an Aztec eagle embroidered on the heel; a map of the Tijuana-San Diego area printed on the removable insole and inside the tongue; a secret pocket on the outer tongue; on the heel an image of Santo Toribio Romo, Mexican saint of migrants; and finally, a label on the inner tongue reading: “BRINCO. Judy Werthein 2005. This product was manufactured in China under a minimum wage of US\$42 per month working 12 hour days.” In addition, the sneakers come with pain relievers (fig 7).

Werthein’s design is full of symbolic meanings, as well as utilitarian features, for example, two eagles, two nations, a map showing the most common routes and a “survival kit” with accessories designed for the natural and human dangers the migrants face. The predominant green color with some details in white and red recall the Mexican flag. The eagle on the heel is an important symbol in Mexican culture. In pre-Columbian times, the god Huitzilopochtli had commanded to his people - the Mexicas - to build their empire where they would find an eagle devouring a snake on top of a cactus. By Texcoco lake, the Mexicas found the sign and thus erected the city of Tenochtitlán, which later become Mexico City. The symbol was used again after the independence war, and became the coat of arms for the Mexican flag in 1813. Although the design has been transformed throughout time, the eagle stills represent a national symbol of the foundation of Mexico as an independent nation.

In contrast, the eagle embroidered on the front of the sneakers is found on the American quarter dollar coin, representing the direction towards which migrants head, as well as the economic promise they are pursuing.

As sometimes immigrants are robbed or abandoned by smugglers in the middle of the desert, *Brinco* included a small secret pocket where Tylenol was supplied but in which they could also hide their money. Additionally, also included was the image of the Santo Toribio, popularly known as the *protector de los mojudos*, (the “wetbacks” protector), to whom the families of migrants, and immigrants themselves offer their prayers.⁷⁵ Considering all these elements, it could be said – as border crosser Javier Lopez joked after receiving a pair of *Brinco* - that the only thing missing was a sensor to alert immigrants to the Border Patrol.⁷⁶

Brinco not only works as an object of use and consumption, but also serves to bring forward a complex discourse on immigration (fig 8). In doing so, it makes a political statement. Moreover, as curator and critic Joshua Decter states, what is important to acknowledge is Werthein’s ability to create “utilitarian-aesthetic wearable products designed to agitate.”⁷⁷

⁷⁵ According to popular legends, Toribio Romo helped people to cross the border, as the following story describes: “about 20 years ago a young man from the state of Michoacán who had been unable to cross the border successfully, was befriended by a man who told him, ‘I will take you across.’ And he did, though the young man had no money to pay him. ‘If things go well for you and you return to your homeland,’ the man said, ‘come look for me in Santa Ana de Guadalupe.’ Some time later, the young migrant returned to look for his benefactor. But he only had the man’s name. He knocked on door after door in Santa Ana, where many residents share the *Romo* family name, but no living person they knew answered the description he gave. Finally, an old woman showed him a picture of *Toribio Romo*, and the young man finally recognized his helper. The woman directed him to the local church, where an old ossuary with *Romo’s* bones was on display at the altar.” Tessie Borden, “Border Saints,” *Hispanic* 16:4 (April 2003).

⁷⁶ Javier Lopez quoted in Elliot Spagat, “Designer Donates Sneakers for Border Run,” *The Washington Post* (17 Nov. 2005).

⁷⁷ Joshua Decter, “Transitory Agencies and Situational Engagements: the Artists as Public Interlocutor?,” *InSite 05 [Situational] Public > Público [Situacional]*, ed. Donna Conwell and Osvaldo Sánchez (San Diego: Installation Gallery, 2006) 296.

Wertheim acknowledges illegal immigration as a fact - 1.5 million people try to illegally cross the border every year - exposing the involvement and complicity taking place in the border zones of Mexico and the United States. She remind us of the reasons people from Latin American countries have to leave their homes, and the anti-immigration policies that complicate their journey. She also points out the economic benefits of this illegal activity. For example, farmers and industries hire undocumented workers and evade taxes; “coyotes” and “polleros” charge high fees with the promise of helping immigrants cross the border, and sometimes abuse their position and rob or abandon migrants in the desert; the American economy depends on “undocumented taxpayers”; the Mexican government benefits from remittances sent home by immigrants, which play a key role in its economy; and, finally, the global economy privileges the mobility of capital while restricting the mobility of people.

What is more, *Brinco* focuses on the connections between Mexico and the United States. By revealing the needs and problems immigrants face when trying to cross the border, Wertheim stirred up debate on the economies that illegal immigrants support. An important aspect of this project is thus Wertheim’s strategy of provocation as she created an unprecedented project that put into conflict the roles different institutions and individuals (from both sides of the border) play in the immigration issue.

2.2. The Unhealthy and Mislaced Other: Media Response

On November 17, 2005, Associated Press released an article entitled “Designer Donates Sneakers for Border Run” by Elliot Spagat.⁷⁸ It included a general description of

⁷⁸ A staff writer for Associated Press in San Diego since April 2003, Spagat covers the Mexico-United States border.

the sneakers, and fragments of interviews and conversations between the artist and some of the people who received a pair of shoes before they attempted to cross the border. The article pointed out that Werthein had caused a “mini-controversy in art circles,” and that she had been accused of “encouraging illegal immigration - a charge she rejects, saying people will cross with or without her shoes.”⁷⁹ It also emphasized the issue of funding: “The shoes, which she gives away to migrants seeking to cross the border into the United States, were designed through an art grant to assist their crossing.”⁸⁰

Only 1,000 pairs of the “Brinco” sneakers (it means “Jump” in Spanish) have been made in China, for \$17 each. The shoes were introduced in August at inSite, an art exhibition in San Diego and Tijuana whose sponsors include nonprofit foundations and private collectors. Benefactors put up \$40,000 for the project; Werthein gets a \$5,000 stipend, plus expenses.⁸¹

A few days after the publication of this article, news of Werthein’s project disseminated worldwide. *Brinco* occupied the front page of the *New York Daily News* and it was the subject of analysis on diverse TV channels, radio stations and newspapers, as well as blogs and forums on the Internet. In the United States, the story was covered by CNN, BBC World Service and Fox News, among many others. The public discussion that ensued in mainstream American media, on-line publications and blogs centered primarily on whether Werthein’s sneakers encouraged illegal immigration into the United States.

Brinco, stirred up debate for and against immigration, and aroused resentment in major anti-immigrant organizations in the United States, for instance the Minutemen

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Project and Save Our State.⁸² Peter Lanteri, New York spokesman for the Minutemen stated: “What she is doing is helping people break the law [...] That’s only going to encourage more people to break the law. Instead, she should be focusing on making it easier for people to come here illegally.”⁸³ The American media found it offensive that an immigrant was giving away sneakers to support illegal aliens and although Wertheim repeatedly argued she did not seek to encourage illegal immigration, the majority of the discussions in the media centered on this fact.⁸⁴ For example, on November 18, 2005, the Editorial of the *New York Daily News* stated: “Between these things and those useful pamphlets the Mexican government has been passing out (“How to Avoid Border Guards,” etc.), illegals hardly need much else, do they? Welcome to America. Always room for more. Make yourselves comfortable. Hey! Nice shoes!”⁸⁵

On the other hand, discussions beyond the mainstream media centered on binaries for and against Wertheim’s project – and illegal immigration. On inSite’s website, as well as numerous blogs and forums on the Internet, *Brinco* provoked hot discussion (fig 9). One blog entry comments on an interview with Wertheim on “Fox and Friends:”

When the buddies (Fox and Friends) introduced the sneaker’s segment, E.D. said it was something that ‘would make your blood boil.’ They described the sneakers in scathing terms and obsessed about Ms. Wertheim engaging in possible ‘illegal’ activities because she was ‘encouraging’ illegal immigration. Like the good little ‘compassionate’ conservatives that they are, they avoided any discussion of the

⁸² The Minuteman Project is an activist organization of American citizens patrolling the border created in Arizona in October 2004.

⁸³ Peter Lanteri quoted in Helen Kennedy, “This Hi-Tops for Sneaking Across Border.” *New York Daily News* (18 November 2005) 28..

⁸⁴ Amy Isackson, “State-of-the-Art Shoes Aid Migrants,” *BBC News*, The World programme, San Diego, 17 November 2005; Elliot Spagat, “Designer Donates Sneakers for Border Run,” *Associated Press* (17 November 2005); Lisa Turvey, “Judi Wertheim,” *Artforum International* 46:4 (December 2007) 358-359.

⁸⁵ Editorial, “Crossing the Line,” *New York Daily News* (18 November 2005) 46.

perils of the journey north. Following the sneakers, they had Rep. Duncan Hunter (from bizarre republican world) discuss the advantages of a wall between Mexico and the US which I am sure really revved up the red staters. I later watched Gibson segment. Ms. Werthein was superb. The great white could not shake her. The piece de resistance was when he asked her about the small male face on the back of the sneaker heel (Friends thought it was 'some Mexican'). She calmly responded that it was St. Toribio Romo Gonzalez, the patron saint of immigrants "approved by the Vatican." Gibson had no comeback. It was priceless.⁸⁶

Also important for the media was the fact that the sneakers were sold for \$ 215 in San Diego, but were given away for free in Mexico. Although, in most cases, a negative critique was embedded, others commented: "Though the store is only about 15 miles (24km) from Tijuana, here the champagne-sipping crowd sees the Brinco as a vehicle for discussion - not transport."⁸⁷

A different discussion, though, took place outside the U.S. media. For example, the stages of production, circulation, consumption and appropriation of the shoes in relation to global flows of capital *Brinco* addressed were commented on in the print media of Mexico and other Latin American publications.⁸⁸ In an article published in the newspaper *México del Norte* on December 9, 2005, Osvaldo Sánchez commented that this project sought to denounce the double discourse of a world power that refuses to

⁸⁶ The inSite_05 catalogue includes a selection of extracts from web blogs about *Brinco*; the above extract was quoted from it. , Conwell and , Sánchez, ed., *InSite 05 [Situational] Public > Público [Situacional]*, 168.

⁸⁷ Amy Isackson, "State-of-the-Art Shoes Aid Migrants," *BBC News*, The World programme, San Diego, 17 November 2005.

⁸⁸ See María F. Cartagena, "Entrevista a Judi Werthein," *LatinArt*. (1 December 2005); Claudia Castro, "Regalan a Migrantes Tenis con Brújula Fronteriza," *El Universal* (18 November 2005); Jaime Hernandez, "Tenis Sólo para Migrantes," *El Universal* (21 November 2005) 2; and Jorge Mújica Murias, "Zapatos Vemos, Uniformes no Sabemos," *México del Norte* (9 December 2005).

recognize the right of more than 10 million of undocumented workers in the United States.⁸⁹

Among the issues that were not carried by the media are those which reinforce essentialist and racist discourses, and international labor policies and globalization - aspects that were not scrutinized, though they are implicated in this project. In order to approach this issue, I draw on Brah's chapter "Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities,"⁹⁰ especially on her analysis of Mexican and Latin American undocumented workers in the United States. I argue that the public discussion in U.S. media privileged and reinforced a colonial strategy by pointing out responsibilities and reducing the problem as inherent to the Other, that is, "illegal aliens invading United States territory." As this strategy *naturalizes* power structures, the point here is to de-naturalize the racialised formations of the illegal Other embedded in the media's colonial discourse.

To begin, I call attention to two different cases on illegal immigration similar to Wertheim's project previously discussed in the American media. In 1993, the Clinton Administration was scrutinized by the media for a controversy known as the "Nannygate Scandal," which centered on the employment of an undocumented Peruvian couple by Zoe Baird, President Clinton's nominee for the position of Attorney-General, who earned an annual salary of \$500,000. The story caused a great deal of controversy. As Brah notes: "The debate centered mainly on the question of the employment of 'illegal immigrants' and the non-payment of social security taxes by a prospective minister of the state who would be responsible for administering the Immigration and Naturalisation

⁸⁹ Jorge Mújica Murias, "Zapatos Vemos, Uniformes no Sabemos," *México del Norte* (9 December 2005).

⁹⁰ Brah, "Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities," *Cartographies of Diaspora*.

laws.”⁹¹ The exploitation of migrant workers in low-wage sectors, however, did not get the same attention, even though the statistics presented in the media at the same time “clearly demonstrated this aspect.”⁹²

Similarly, the media misdirected commentary on another San Diego art project, *Arte Rebate/Arte Reembolso* (1993), by David Avalos, Louis Hock and Elizabeth Sisco. The project entailed of the distribution of envelopes with ten-dollar bills and the following statement to illegal workers in San Diego: “This ten dollar bill is part of an art project that intends to return tax dollars to taxpayers, particularly ‘undocumented taxpayers.’ The art rebate acknowledges your role as a vital player in an economic community indifferent to national borders.”⁹³ *Arte Rebate/Arte Reembolso* was commissioned by the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art and the Centro Cultural de la Raza, as part of the exhibition *La Frontera/The Border*. From July to August, the artists distributed \$4,500 of a \$5,000 budget among undocumented workers. This project provoked vigorous debate, however the discussion did not center on the issue of immigration, but instead on a critique of the issue of funding and the public institutions from the United States that supported it. As Robert Pincus points out: “Even the initial story on this piece in the San Diego Union-Tribune made use of taxpayers funds the leading issue, ignoring the artist’s central concern with the role of illegal immigrants in the U.S. economy.”⁹⁴

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 202.

⁹³ Robert L. Pincus, “The Invisible Time Square: Artists’ Collaborations and Media Dramas in America’s Biggest Border Town,” *But is it Art?: the Spirit of Art as Activism*, ed. Nina Felshin (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995) 48.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

The reason I mention these two cases is to show how the “official” discourse naturalizes complex discussions on illegal immigration by focusing on everything but a critical, self-reflexive consideration and an acknowledgment of undocumented workers in the United States. Neither can these issues be reduced to the economic exploitation of migrants, but must take into account the complexity of the problem and the numerous agents linked to this issue on both sides of the border. In her analysis on the “Nannygate Scandal,” Brah comes to a conclusion that is essential for my purpose here, as it links the two examples I have mentioned to Judi Werthein’s project. She argues:

[F]ar from challenging the discourse of the ‘undocumented workers,’ this public furor re-inscribed it, pathologising the migrant worker as the problem. In other words the exclusionary practices that underlie constructions of the ‘undocumented worker’ as a juridical subject were naturalised alongside a simultaneous legitimisation of the very legal processes that had produced the juridical category in the first place.⁹⁵

In the specific case of *Brinco*, both the illegal aliens and Werthein’s act of giving away these sneakers were designated as the problem, and she was even accused of committing a crime.⁹⁶ As a counterpoint, my interest is to signal what the U.S. media ignored, Mexican illegal immigrants in the United States, and the way Werthein’s project connected the illegal immigrants and the maquiladora system to the fashion/sports industry and the art world (fig 10, 11).

⁹⁵ Brah, “Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities,” 202.

⁹⁶ Judi Werthein, Personal Interview, 1 July 2008.

According to Brah, the U.S.-Mexico border “typifies the conditions of contemporary migrancy.”⁹⁷ She states that, although each border has its own narratives, the U.S.-Mexico border “encapsulates certain common thematics which frequently come into play whenever the ‘overdeveloped’ countries institute measures to control selectively the entry of peoples from economically ‘underdeveloped’ segments of the people.”⁹⁸ Since the economic conditions in the underdeveloped countries become more serious citizens around the world immigrate to overdeveloped countries. This mobility, however, is not the same as the mobility of capital. As British scholar Derek Gregory assesses, “[m]odern metropolitan cultures privileged their own mobility,” while “[p]rivilege’ has to be understood literally; there are other cultures of travel within which movement is a burden, an imposition, even a tragedy.”⁹⁹

From an economical perspective, the Mexican diaspora in the United States plays a contradictory position. According to Brah

[T]here emerges the paradox of the ‘*undocumented worker*’ - *needed to service lower rungs of the economy, but criminalized, forced to go underground, rendered invisible; cast as a phantom, an absent presence that shadows the nooks and crannies wherever low-paid work is performed.* [emphasis in original]

The American labour market demands Mexican workers to fill the lowest jobs in the maquiladora industry, in agriculture and in the construction and service sector, at the same time legal restrictions and anti-illegal immigration policies are promoted, along with the intensification of racism. Not only do Mexicans suffer resentment of Americans

⁹⁷ Brah, “Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities,” 198.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁹⁹ Derek Gregory, “Connective Dissonance: Imagined geographies and the Colonial Present,” *Space Odysseys Spatiality and Social Relations in the 21st Century*, ed. Jørgen Ole Bærenholdt and Kirsten Simonsen (Denmark: Roskilde University, 2004) 206.

for “taking our jobs,” but they are also considered to directly and negatively affect American economy by evading tax-payment, and by contributing to the flow of U.S. dollars out of the country. In addition, there is the tendency to associate immigrants with criminal activity.¹⁰⁰

The “paradox of undocumented workers” is connected to the colonial discourse of the *other*. In his essay “The Unhealthy and Misplaced Other,” geographer Keld Buciek explains that the power project of modernization, based on binaries oppositions could hardly succeed without establishing the idea of the unhealthy other – unhealthy simply because she/he is misplaced.¹⁰¹ Buciek notes that in modern discourses the health/wealth of a nation, as well as the physical and moral constitution of its people were thought to be closely related. Hence the alien becomes the “unwelcome stranger... the invader of an originally healthy nation.”¹⁰² Although these ideas have been extensively discussed,¹⁰³ I draw from Buciek as he focuses on the connections between space, place and mobility, a fundamental relation raised with Wertheim’s *Brinco*.

For example, the claims of ownership and territory, as well as the undesirable outsiders were extensively discussed on the inSite’s blog, which was saturated after the media coverage in November 2005. Entries range from hate comments to supportive messages to the artist, but certainly *Brinco* provoked vigorous discussions. On Wholewheatblogger, a public blog, someone wrote:

¹⁰⁰ Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper*, 113.

¹⁰¹ Keld Buciek, “The Unhealthy and Misplaced Other,” *Space Odysseys Spatiality and Social Relations in the 21st Century*, ed. Jørgen Ole Bærenholdt and Kirsten Simonsen (Denmark: Roskilde University, 2004).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 192. Buciek suggests that a deconstruction of the *us* and *them* leads to “accepting ourselves as incomplete,” and to the acknowledgment “that no such a thing as pure society exists.”

¹⁰³ For example, Homi K. Bhabha, “The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism,” *The Location of Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask*, trans. Charles Lee Markmann (New York: Grove 1986); Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: a Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, (New York; Columbia University Press, 1994) 66-11.

Judy Werthein has only been a citizen of the U.S. for 8 years, which she claims is legal. I not sure what gives her the right to encourage illegal mexicans in the name of art. I think her art (real art) and the sneakers should be given away to mexican (free) along with a flashlight, map back to Mexico, and a list of local agencies that promote education and self-help in your own country.¹⁰⁴

A different opinion was registered on the inSite's blog:

I work in the social service field. Let me inform those that are ignorant to how services are received; 1. You must have a state ID. 2. You must have a social security number. Without these items you cannot receive assistance. NO free FOOD, NO free MEDICAL attention, NO free HOUSING... Undocumented migrants are the people who save social security, because we have over spend it. Their dollars go into the pot, but they can't get any of it back. Let's ask the big dogs where the all tax monies are going that these hard working people are deducted. This year alone there were 42.5 million dollars that were not claimed because of there were no social security numbers to file tax refund. Let's get it right. I will be buying a pair of these shoes.¹⁰⁵

These and other comments on different web blogs exemplify the public debates that were taking place, the majority of which were based on the discourse of the "misplaced other."

The paradox of the undocumented worker has its origin in this colonial discourse of the other. In the specific case of the United States, the Mexican and Latin American

¹⁰⁴ Kim quoted in Conwell and Sánchez, ed., *InSite 05 [Situational] Public > Público [Situacional]*, 168.

¹⁰⁵ Public User in *ibid.*, 171.

diasporas have been constructed as “illegal aliens.”¹⁰⁶ The term is interesting here as it reveals the ideological construct of the outsider, the invader, and thus supports claims of territory and the right to the land.

In a personal interview, Werthein argues that the problem of illegal workers in the United States is more complex, and that she stressed this fact when she was questioned in mainstream media. She explains: “They keep asking me ‘don’t you see that Mexicans take out the jobs of Americans workers?’” The production of *Brinco* in Chinese manufactures and Werthein’s response to this question expose in fact the conditions, under which products are made and the role of American companies in the “taking out the jobs” issue. As she points out, these kinds of factories are not even in the United States. The manufacture is made in another countries, thus the responsibility relies on the American companies themselves that are not hiring Americans. According to her “There are much more workers hired by American companies around the world than illegal immigrants in the United States.”¹⁰⁷

2.3. Made in China: the Work of Art as Object of Desire

This section analyzes *Brinco* as object of desire and consumption, and *Brinco* as a pair of sneakers for people intending to illegally enter U.S. territory. My discussion focuses on the relation between the object and the two consumers it targets: migrants and consumers on the U.S.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Nevins dates the origin of this term in U.S. public discourse to the last two decades. Nevins, Operation Gatekeeper.

¹⁰⁷ Werthein, Personal Interview, 1 July 2008.

¹⁰⁸ Werthein’s project can be related to Bourriaud’s *Relational Aesthetics*, for it literally addresses *use over contemplation*, yet at the same time it contradicts the idea of *process over object*, as the final product is a pair of sneakers sold as limited-edition art objects. If analyzed in terms of *Relational Aesthetics*, the criteria to evaluate this work may consider the kind of “relations” produced by the work. My discussion, however,

As regards the consumption of five hundred pairs of this limited-edition art object, is interesting to note how this product was inserted into the market, and who the consumers were. On one hand, the product was not restricted to the art market, as it was originally sold in a high-end shoe store in downtown San Diego, and according to media consumers were not necessarily art collectors (fig 12). Though the design features disturbed many, they did not bother consumers: the product sold well. The fact that funds went to non-profit institutions may have relieved some consciences. Here, I stress two points: first, Werthein's ability in designing an articulated discourse of illegal immigration and the market's facility in absorbing the product.

On the other hand, the design of the product plays a fundamental role as Werthein did consider market strategies - design, color, composition - to create an attractive pair of sneakers based on the sports-fashion market. Furthermore, *Brinco* did have an impact on the art world, as witnessed by its inclusion in numerous exhibitions, mainly in Europe.¹⁰⁹

In a recent interview, Werthein declared that her purpose in creating *Brinco* was "to develop a critique of a global economic system that spreads consumerism while ignoring human needs such as migrating for a better life."¹¹⁰ Indeed, she had the ability to create an art project that functioned as provocation, commodity, and which critically connected the border zone with the global economy and addressed global manufacturing and competition. While *Brinco* implicitly exposes the exploitation of Third World

does not draw on Bourriaud's ideas. See Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance & Fronza Woods (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2002). For a critical view, see Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (Fall 2004) 51-79.

¹⁰⁹ Drawing from Foster, if considered in light of political art's interest on class agency and productive practices, Werthein's impact may depend on the immigrants' satisfactory possession of the shoes on their feet, and how efficient the items were to help people successfully cross the border. As an art project, however, Werthein's *Brinco* has indeed impacted the art world. See Foster, "For a Concept of the Political," 140.

¹¹⁰ Werthein quoted in Bruce Finley, "Artist Displays a Shoe of Force," *The Denver Post* (5 March 2008).

countries by transnational companies and profit on a global scale, as well as issues of illegal immigration, human rights, international labor policies, and wage differentials, these topics were only addressed in art magazines and specialized art critiques. In the inSite's catalogue, art historian Donna Conwell wrote: "In a single object, Werthein reveals the contradictions between fashion, competition in the manufacturing industry, and migratory flows, themes that lie at the heart of the dynamics of labor geography in today's world."¹¹¹

In following years, as *Brinco* has been included in different exhibitions around the world, the critique has also referred to the media coverage, not only as documentation or archival material, but specifically as it become part of the work itself. Subsequent exhibitions have screened interviews of Werthein in U.S. broadcast and print media, such as in "Space Invaders," Museo de Las Americas, Santa Fe Denver (February 8 - June 8, 2008); "The Irresistible Force," Tate Modern, London (September 20 – 25 November 2007); "If You Don't Believe in Something You'll Fall for Anything," EFA Gallery, N.Y. (May 2007), and "On Mobility," De Appel, Amsterdam (July 15-August 27 2006). Art reviews and curator' statements have addressed Werthein's project from a more informed perspective, opening up discussion to the relationship between the different economies scrutinized in *Brinco*.

As a political statement, *Brinco* provoked a great deal of debate. However criticism in the mass media (especially from the United States) did not focus on the fact that this pair of shoes put into conflict an art object made in China as a product of cheap labour that targeted, on the one hand a consumerist society - that being the art world and

¹¹¹ Donna Conwell, "Border (Dis)order/ on the Imaginative Possibilities of the In-Between," *InSite 05 [Situational] Public > Público [Situacional]*, 21.

the fashion/sport industry - and on the other hand, people who would use the features of this sneakers to illegally cross the border between Mexico and the United States.

Werthein unpacked the “unequal geography of globalization” and pointed out the border zones as “‘sites of lucrative manufacturing production’ in the globalization of capital.”¹¹² At the same time, she exposed the gap between the market, the art world and the economic conditions that force people to illegally cross the border. In interviews, Werthein denounced the desperate conditions that force individuals to leave their countries to engage in a life threatening journey that is far from the theoretical, celebratory assumptions of border-crossings as desirable.¹¹³ She thus reminded us that “for the displaced or the dispossessed, the migrant or refugee, no distance is more awesome than the few feet across borders or frontiers.”¹¹⁴

2.4 The Illegal Other’s New Shoes¹¹⁵

The impact of *Brinco* transcended the art world. The discursive elements of its design and Werthein’s strategy of distribution (free to immigrants, while wealthy consumers with disposable income paid \$215, which was donated to non-profit organizations helping immigrants in Mexico) strategically exploited the media’s power of

¹¹² Ali Behdad, “On Globalization, Again,” *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, ed. Ania Loomba et al., (N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005) 77; Lugo, “Reflections on Border Theory, Culture and the Nation,” 57.

¹¹³ For example, consider the work of Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* (1987) and Renato Rosaldo *Culture & Truth: the Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989). For a contrasting view see David E. Johnson and Scott Michaelsen, ed., “Border Secrets: An Introduction,” *Border Theory: the Limits of Cultural Politics*, 1-41.

¹¹⁴ Homi K. Bhabha quoted in Gregory, “Connective Dissonance,” 207.

¹¹⁵ The title of this section and the chapter itself relies on a phrase that parodies “the illegals’ new shoes” in connection to *The Emperor’s New Clothes* by Hans Christian Andersen. I draw from a comment made in a blog entry which mentioned that probably Werthein’ sneakers were the best pair of shoes a Mexican immigrant would ever have. See Conwell and Sánchez, eds., *InSite 05 [Situational] Public> Público [Situacional]*, 169.

dissemination to reach a broader audience. It is in this sense that I consider Werthein's strategy as activism. According to Nina Felshin, the form and methodology of activist art projects privilege process over object; seek community engagement and active impact in the "real world." Activist art, she wrote: "represents a confluence of the aesthetic, sociopolitical, and technological impulses of the past twenty-five years or more that have attempted to challenge, explore or blur the boundaries and hierarchies traditionally defining the culture as represented by those in power."¹¹⁶ As a consequence, eliciting media coverage is a fundamental strategy in activist art practices.¹¹⁷

Brinco provoked an intense public debate, therefore its *active* effect on society lies in both its utilitarian value for immigrants and its strategy of provocation. Provocation is considered here literally, for each element of the processes of production, design and distribution, addressed and raised troublesome issues that irritated the media and public alike. Thus *Brinco* operated as a disturbing object reminding the wider general public of uncomfortable facts about illegal immigration, sweatshop production and the global economy.

Ultimately, what remained unacknowledged by the mass media were the critical underpinnings of this art project from a postcolonial perspective. Issues of power within discourses of immigration concerning keeping the other as illegal alien with no rights in the U.S. is a long-standing strategy to keep Latin-American immigrants subordinated and unable to benefit from their position. The power of Werthein's project is not only to make them visible, but to effectively design a complex wearable art product that addresses the difficulties of the latter's journey north, while at the same time critically addressing the

¹¹⁶ Nina Felshin, *But is it Art?: the Spirit of Art as Activism* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995) 10.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

economies that benefit from and control the mobility of capital, that ironically includes the “illegal mobility” of migrants as well.

This chapter has discussed how *Brinco* addresses fundamental aspects of the global system and uncovers the role that the multinational companies play in issues of immigration. Given these points, the next chapter focuses on spatiality and social relations in the border cities of Tijuana and San Diego.

Chapter Three

Gustavo Artigas: the Rules, the Game and the Nation

My third case study focuses on Gustavo Artigas' work, *The Rules of the Game [Las Reglas del Juego]* (2000), for the 2000-2001 edition of inSite, which was structured in two parts.¹¹⁸ *The Rules of the Game I* consisted of the installation of a public handball court beside the Tijuana-San Diego border fence. *The Rules of the Game II*, on the other hand, consisted of a simultaneous sports event between two basketball teams from the United States and two soccer teams from Mexico played at the same time, on the same court, with simultaneous commentary in English and Spanish. The aim of this chapter is to investigate the connections between these two parts of *The Rules of the Game*, the handball court and the sports-event, with "the rules of the two nations" divided by the fence between Mexico and the United States.

In order to analyze how rules are structured in Artigas' games, and how they are related to narratives of nations a review of Artigas' artistic practice and agency is essential, as "rules" and "games" have been two fundamental elements of his work.

Artigas' artistic practice can be explained in regards to two important categories of art history. On one hand, he is an "itinerant artist" as defined by Miwon Kwon, an artist who travels from one place to another to provide services rather than producing art objects; itinerant artists research, negotiate, coordinate, organize, and their presence

¹¹⁸ Gustavo Artigas was born in Mexico City in 1970, where he lives and works. He obtained a BFA from the Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas, UNAM (1991-1995). In the last ten years, Artigas' actions, public interventions, videos and games have drawn the attention of critics and curators worldwide, thus he has become one of Mexico's most important visual artists in the international circuit. Although the artist thought of this project as a two-part work of art, they are analyzed here separately.

becomes fundamental to placing the work within the exhibition context.¹¹⁹ According to Kwon, the starting point is the commission of the work and services, then,

the artist enters into a contractual agreement with the host institution for the commission. There follow repeated visits to or extended stays at the site; research into the particularities of the institution and/or the city within which it is located [...]; and many meeting with curators, educators and administrative support staff, who may all end up ‘collaborating’ with the artist to produce the work.¹²⁰

Finally, to continue the “biennial cycle” the dissemination of the project will result in another commission, and so on and so forth. Artigas’ work responds to commissions from international biennials, events, and museums, by investigating controversial and/or political issues of a specific location and responding to them by creating a situation that often involves uncertainty, risk, game, conflict, disaster, and limits.

On the other hand, Artigas can be considered a “relational” artist. According to Bourriaud, relational aesthetics takes as its theoretical horizon “the realm of human interactions and its social context.”¹²¹ Relational art moves from goods to services and service-based-community; privileges process over (art) object, use over contemplation; and engages viewers’ active participation, such that audiences are considered as a community.¹²² Practices particularly conducive to relational aesthetics include artist-in-residence programs, events and work that create and supports the “experience economy”

¹¹⁹ Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002) 51.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹²¹ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 14.

¹²² Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” 54.

and the “laboratory paradigm.”¹²³ In addition, as Bishop sums up, relational art is “Work that is open-ended, interactive, and resistant to closure, often appearing to be work in progress rather than a complete object.”¹²⁴ Artigas’ work can be said to be “relational” in so far as he works with human interactions and its social context, and he follows an investigative methodology that provides services to institutions and creates experiences for the audience. With regard to the laboratory model, he responds with investigations of local-specific problems, and he stages a space of observation and experimentation. As he puts it, his work is “an organic process in which, although there are a series of hypothesis, they never eliminate the human factor of the different teams and groups embedded in the development of the pieces, events or processes.”¹²⁵

However, Artigas’ work contradicts some characteristics of relational art. Working with social relations as subject matter and medium, he coordinates situations in which the audience’s role is reduced to observation. The “relations” produced between his events and the audience, are based on the viewer’s perception as he does not specifically create projects in which artists and audience participate in democratic and literal relations, “*learning to inhabit the world in a better way*” (Bourriaud’s emphasis).¹²⁶ Artigas exaggerates social disparities through simulacra events structured as games and troubles ways of living and being-together. He does not seek social

¹²³ According to Bishop, the laboratory paradigm becomes capitalized and marketable as spaces of leisure and entertainment, while the experience economy is “the marketing strategy that seeks to replace goods and services with scripted and staged personal experiences.” Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” 52.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Gustavo Artigas, Personal Interview, 21 June 2008.

¹²⁶ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 13.

harmony within art institutions, but instead “sustains a tension among viewers, participants and context... discomfort rather than belonging.”¹²⁷

By opposing social agents Artigas focuses on conflict and investigates social tensions determined by group organizations, classes, gender, race, etc.¹²⁸ Artigas’ agency is thus imbued with disturbance:

Before anything I see myself as an artist. Then I became an instigator, an element of instability in more complex social constructions, a meta-player in a series of matches, in which we see reflected more formal and informal aspects... In a way, opening the possibilities of aesthetic experience and its impact on the vital experience.¹²⁹

The relations explored in Artigas’ practice are established through situations in which he invites people to form part of a game and he sets the rules drawing from real games and sports. The selection of games and players, as well as the specific rules the artist establishes, need discussion as all elements are intertwined with the artist’s discourse. He uses games to create metaphors or reality and to reveal social frictions through irony, thus, Artigas creates games in which all elements point to social critique. As Eduardo Pérez Soler states, Artigas’ events are:

the actions of a game that represent certain anomalous and disturbing elements, and allow the artist to allude to an oppressive and disquieting reality. Using an apparent playful aspect of games, Gustavo Artigas offers us works that

¹²⁷ Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” 78. I consider this quote, in which Bishop discusses the work of Spanish artist Santiago Sierra and Swiss Thomas Hirschhor, as her description also applies to Artigas’ work.

¹²⁸ For example, *The Domino Effect* (2000) commissioned by the 7th Havana Biennial, consisted of a domino competition between four prostitutes and four male visual artists. For each game lost, participants had to drink a glass of rum, eliminating the players that could no longer drink or compete. The champion was awarded a bottle of rum.

¹²⁹ Artigas, Personal Interview, 21 June 2008.

indent/present us with a world in which the subject appears to be subjected to moral conflict, physical risk and even physical and emotional imbalance. They are works that trace a pessimistic and anxious view of the condition of the contemporary individual.¹³⁰

In the specific case of *The Rules of the Game*, all these elements intersect, thus the concept, structure and title address two important characteristics of Artigas' strategy: rules and games. As the relationship between them is not arbitrary, but extremely important to this piece, the purpose of this chapter is to investigate the connections between this project and "the rules of the nation."

To begin, a brief overview of the general structure of games and sports is important as it bears some relation to Artigas' agency. Essentially, games are social or individual activities played according to rules; in order to take place, a game needs participants to know the rules and to be willing to follow them to enter the game. As game logic is based on competitiveness, the main goal is to win. In the same way, sports follow this logic in which "individuals learn the values and behavior of a competitive and success-driven society."¹³¹

Another aspect of games that is relevant to the discussion of the nation-state is the relationship between the capitalist system, the structure of sports, as well as the role sports play on the assimilation of immigrants into American society. As media theorist Douglas Kellner notes: "During the industrial era, actually playing sports was an adjunct

¹³⁰ Eduardo Pérez Soler, "Gustavo Artigas: the Game Ain't Over Yet," *Gustavo Artigas*, (2004).

¹³¹ Douglas Kellner, *Media Spectacle* (London: New York: Routledge, 2003) 65.

to labor and production [...] sports taught individuals both how to play as part of a collective, to fit into a team, and how to display initiative and distinguish themselves.”¹³²

Games draw from reality and are based on social dynamics, thus the laws established in a game world are often metaphors of the real world. Yet one of the most important differences, and perhaps what make most of the games *fun*, is that games are representations, simulations, rehearsals, “just” games in which, unlike reality, there is not much to lose. As American art critic and writer Sally O’Reilly wrote, games are “a way of rehearsing future conflicts with all the effects of methodology, but without too much at stake.”¹³³ Furthermore, through irony Artigas effectively connects games with social conflict. Marshall McLuhan wrote that a game, like any other art form, “is a mere tangible model of another situation that is less accessible [and thus] there is always a tingling sense of oddity and fun in play or games that renders the very earnest and very serious person or society laughable.”¹³⁴ In *The Rules of the Game I and II*, Artigas uses humour to reveal social tensions on the border zone as subject of analysis, as well as laughter.

3.1. The Rules of the Game I: Can We Have Our Ball Back Please?

In the first part of the project, *The Rules of the Game I*, Artigas transformed the landscape of the border zone with a handball court installed on the Mexican side. By creating this space for leisure, public use and social relations, he recontextualized the

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ Sally O’Reilly, “Gustavo Artigas. On Conflict, Spectacle and Disaster,” *Contemporary* 66 (2004) 31.

¹³⁴ Cited in Kathryn Smith, “Gustavo Artigas and the Art of Mud Wrestling,” *ArtThrob News* (16 December 2001).

space and established an ironic relationship between the neighbor cities of Tijuana and San Diego (fig 13).

The court was installed at Colonia Libertad, an important smuggling area highly surveyed by the Border Patrol. Since this neighborhood ends where the fence begins, it is a symbolically-charged space that embodies the material differences between the wealthy and the poor. For this project, the fence, extremely patrolled yet vulnerable as structure, was covered up with a higher (approximately 240 inch) and more solid wall than the actual border fence. From October 13, 2000 to February 25, 2001, balls were given away to local residents and visitors and they were also sold at local stores. As Artigas saw it, *The Rules of the Game I* “refers to the possibility of playing games in a land divided by a wall. The border fence becomes a surface on which to play. This project is a critical comment on this border situation, through the exaggeration of the scale of the wall and through the questions it raises regarding the way we approach this separated territory.”¹³⁵

As an intervention in the physical space, the audience was meant to complement the work. Unlike most of Artigas’ pieces, *The Rules of the Game I* had two important characteristics. First, the court was created to actively engage the audience; it had two uses, as handball and basketball courts inserted into a public space for local neighbors to use. Second, as children and teenagers are probably the most common (active) users of public spaces - parks and any other street or public space that can become a “battlefield” for youth’s games - they became active players of Artigas’ game. Although Artigas did not target a clearly-defined audience, the court was appropriated and used by young people of the Libertad neighbourhood.

¹³⁵ Gustavo Artigas, “The Rules of the Game,” *InSite 2000-01* (26 March 2001).

The Rules of the Game intervened in the public space not as a “public art project” but as a public court. Documentation of this project in video and still images illustrates how Artigas inserted the handball court into the daily urban space of Colonia Libertad. The two-minute video on the artist’s website shows various groups of Mexican boys playing Frontón (handball); in one of the sequences a boy easily climbs the American fence and runs after the ball when it goes to the other side of the fence.¹³⁶ This situation was repeated over and over again. As Artigas explains: “The most amusing part of the process is the moment when the teens and children jumped the border in order to bring back the ball. Small acts of illegality that allow the continuation of the game. A small game within the game.”¹³⁷

In this way, Artigas’ project re-contextualized the place by creating a situation in which the politically-charged fence becomes simply another wall, a neighbour’s fence that balls sometimes fly over, as opposed to a highly guarded border area. As O’Reilly puts it, Artigas created “a particularly tense ‘can we have our ball back please’ situation.” She notes: “Although these represented antagonistic conditions that could be analogous to many situations, this vicinity of a political and geographic boundary steep the piece in immigration issues – essentially the accommodation of the other.”¹³⁸

Artigas moved the discussion from a public game court to the ideological realm of games, rules and nations. His intervention on the Tijuana-San Diego border is a subtle yet effective project, and although the critique has focused on the second part of the project - that is, the spectacle of the sporting event - the handball court provokes a situation of

¹³⁶ Stills as well as extracts from the video are available on the artist’s website:

<http://www.gustavoartigas.com/>

¹³⁷ Artigas, Personal Interview, 21 June 2008.

¹³⁸ O’Reilly, “Gustavo Artigas. On Conflict, Spectacle and Disaster,” 27.

conflict and reflection. The border dividing Mexico and the United States, an arbitrary political frontier ideologically contested by both nations, becomes the background of a handball court, a free space of play. The question is then, how does the court relate to the space “outside” the court? More specifically, how are relationships established between *The Rules of the Game* and the rules of the nation on the other side of the handball court?

As an art project, Artigas created a space of play and leisure. The court figures within its surroundings in a symbolic way, as it becomes a metaphor of the games and rules at stake on the border zone. Just as games are based on rules and limits players must follow to be part of a game, on the material field there are rules and limits citizens must respect to be part of their societies. On the other side of Colonia Libertad, the rules are established by a nation in which *active players* are not desired.

Just as spatial limits are determined by playgrounds in sports and games, in the geo-political sphere, nations are delimited by borders; the U.S.-Mexico border has been built and patrolled by the United States in order to stop illegal immigration, as not everybody is invited to enter the “game” of the American nation. Artigas’ game puts into motion this relationship between politics and games. As Mexican critic and curator Cuauhtémoc Medina wrote, Artigas’ project is “a game of adding layers of cultural and political complexity.”¹³⁹ Hence, analyzed in relation to the political arena, *The Rules of the Game I* illustrates U.S. imperialism - the twentieth-century paradigm of mass production and consumption - as a game in which the privileges of the American dream are not for illegal immigrants.

¹³⁹ Cuauhtémoc Medina, “Chasing a Ball in the Political Field,” *Practice and Criticism in Latin America*. The Center for Curatorial Studies. Bard College, New York. 23 Mar. 2001. Lecture.

As an artist who has gained international attention in the contemporary art world, Artigas de-authorized the establishment of the limits between Mexico and the United States with a great deal of irony. With much of the humour that characterizes his work, the border zone delimited by a “passive” structure became an active court that transformed this place for over four months. As this place is already *activated* by illegal border-crossings the effect is not unique. The project’s importance however is not so much based on its “authenticity,” but instead on the connections of this work with the political and social relationship between Tijuana and San Diego.

3.2. The Rules of the Game II: the Court and the Nation

The role of the spectacle is also important in Artigas’ work. Strategically, the organization of a public event as high art mass spectacle is as important as the work itself. Indeed, as Arratia puts it: “Combining the conventions of high art with the voyeurism and titillation of mass spectacle is Artigas’ social specialty.”¹⁴⁰ *The Rules of the Game II*, compared in relation to international sports events, uses the spectacle as strategy while at the same time is absorbed by it. This event, as with most of Artigas’ projects, merges simulacra with spectacle, extreme sports, mass entertainment and popular events (fig 14).

According to media theorist John Fiske, the intensity of feelings, passion and a loss of control are essential to sports fandom. He stresses that for the spectators sitting in the arena the experience “matters” as “In the intensity of the experience the bodily sensations and passions become fully engaged with the externality of the moment of the

¹⁴⁰ Eurídice Arratia, “Gustavo Artigas,” *Bomb* (78, Winter 2001-2) 106.

game and with the environment of the stadium, its players and fans.”¹⁴¹ Just as sports events engage the audience to experience situations, *The Rules of the Game II* also involved emotion and action, feelings and catharsis.

For *The Rules of the Game II*, Artigas adapted a basketball court at the Lázaro Cárdenas high school in Tijuana to host a simultaneous game in which Tijuana and San Diego was represented by a “familiar game” and two teams; From the Mexican side two soccer teams, one of most popular sport industries in the country, and from the United States two basketball teams.

The sports event, announced as a performance/event in the festival’s programme and press release, took place at the gym of Lázaro Cárdenas High School on October 13, 2000. The rules of the game were easy: each game would be played according to its own rules and against the opposite team, but they would share the playground with two more teams playing a different sport. Each sport had its own referee and thus the main challenge for players was to find the way to play within the same space. For Artigas “each community is playing a familiar game. The question is - what happens when they have to share the same space?”¹⁴² At stake here is a simulation of daily life in the cities of Tijuana and San Diego, a game that sought to address the direct relationship between these two communities and to experience, through a game, what happens in a space people from both countries share. As the artist saw it: “we find ourselves immersed in the new games we play each day. Flexibility and an open mind are needed to play the rules

¹⁴¹ John Fiske, *Power Plays, Power Works* (London; New York: Verso, 1993) 88.

¹⁴² Gustavo Artigas, “The Rules of the Game,” *InSite 2000-01* (26 Mar. 2001).

that we rewrite daily. Furthermore, there is always the possibility that by the end of the game the rules will be lost again.”¹⁴³

The sport event took place at the Lázaro Cárdenas High School gym and just as the two games were played at the same time in the same court, both the basketball match and the football match had simultaneous commentary; English for basketball and Spanish for soccer. The four teams were selected based on a standard of age and availability; young people who would be able to participate in an artistic event, with a certain possibility of “openness.” From the U.S. two basketball teams from the San Diego Boys’ and Girls’ Club were selected; the football teams were the *Jaguares* (from the Escuela Preparatoria Federal Lázaro Cárdenas, Tijuana) and CETYS (from CETYS high school) from Mexico (fig 15). The four teams knew their opponents, and in fact a rivalry between the two football teams and the two basketball teams existed previous to the art project, adding both matches a “real character.”¹⁴⁴

For this art project, Artigas adapted only three rules from both sports: first, the playground specially adapted for this match would have to be shared between four teams instead of two; second, two games would be played instead of one; finally, although the goal of each team was to win its own match, all players were granted a trophy, as the goal of the art project was not to win but to play. In doing so, *The Rules of the Game II* deploys the sports event as strategy to simulate the social dynamics citizens from Tijuana and San Diego establish in daily life. Artigas evokes the rules of the game as a metaphor

¹⁴³ Artigas refers to the following quote he used as introductory sentence to the event’s programme: “In December 1891, Canadian professor James Naismith presents in his gymnasium class, Springfield, Massachusetts, his yet-to-be-named invention: A game that in time would be known as basketball. After the first session, the initial 13 rules that regulated the game and which had been hung on the walls of the gymnasium, were stolen. -Jameson Hicks, *History of Sports* qtd. in Gustavo Artigas, “The Rules of the Game,” *InSite 2000-01* (26 Mar. 2001).

¹⁴⁴ Gustavo Artigas, Personal Interview, 21 Jun. 2008.

of the rules of the nation; as the time and space of basketball and soccer matches overlap there is a symbolic relation between the rules players from both sports have to adapt in order to play their own game, to the rules citizens from Tijuana and San Diego break, adapt and transform when sharing a geographical space defined in relation to discourses of the nation.

The social groups playing at the court are identified in relation to nationhood, on a local scale. As this space is connected and contested through the border fence, the concept of nation, as an ideological construct that legitimately divides the space is called into question. On one hand, nationhood is related to Artigas' selection of the sport played. On the other, discourses of nationhood are investigated and contested in the sport event itself. The relationship between sports and nations needs discussion because many governments use sports to create or intensify nationalist discourses "and thus to construct nationalist sentiment which can erase the difference of interest between the power block and the people."¹⁴⁵ International sports event are an example of how sports can contribute to disseminate and reinforce discourses of nationhood and racist claims of superiority among nations and/or races. In short, as Boyle & Haynes state:

With its visibility and focus on symbols, winning competition, partisan fans – and in team games the necessity of collective struggle – few other cultural forms lend themselves as easily as sport to being used as an indicator of certain national characteristics 'representative of a national identity.'¹⁴⁶

Artigas chose the teams and sports based on their nationality, however, as he structured the sports event so the teams from each country were confronted, the attention

¹⁴⁵ John Fiske, *Power Plays, Power Works* (London; New York: Verso, 1993) 90.

¹⁴⁶ Raymond Boyle and Richard Haynes, *Power Play: Sport, the Media and Popular Culture* (London; New York: Longman, 2000) 143.

centered on how players play their own game within the same court; when this game is connected to the geo-political arena, the question is how people from different nationalities can live sharing the space. It is here that the relationship between the two games and the two nations is investigated.

The Rules of the Game II points to the rules of a nation, a political and social space delimited by boundaries in which citizens within frontiers are expected to share common beliefs or as Iris Marion Young puts it, to form part of a whole.¹⁴⁷ Artigas troubles this ideas, the court adapted to host two simultaneous games represents a scale model of the Tijuana-San Diego border zone, a space divided by a fence in which the construction of two nations collide and connect. The simultaneous game evokes daily life, and the teams and players may represent their nation, but their nationality does not matter when the game includes two more teams playing a different sport with its own rules, and players run after two balls.

To complicate the idea of boundary-oriented space with legitimate laws and players, Artigas set a game with thirty young boys. Within the playground the rules became blurry, and the games themselves uncertain; the differences between basketball and soccer, the position of the ball and players, the native language of players, their goals, points, and final scores: all aspects relate to “two groups of people flowing through and negotiating the same space, while each playing their own game.”¹⁴⁸ In fact, participants learnt to share the court and the event took place with no major accidents; “if

¹⁴⁷ According to Young, the desire of totality creates an arbitrary set of categories and distinctions that depend on division and exclusion, for instance pure versus impure, inside versus outside, etc. Young, “The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference”.

¹⁴⁸ Arratia, “Gustavo Artigas,” 105.

the match was to avoid dissolving into farce, some level of cooperation was needed.”¹⁴⁹ Here, it is interesting to note the selection of these teams, considering the social conditions of the participants and the fact that they come from Tijuana and San Diego and are used to coexistence and conflict. For example, the San Diego Boys’ and Girls’ Club are comprised of at-risk youth, marginal subjects for whom negotiating rules and difference is part of their daily life. For the young boys living in the Tijuana-San Diego border, it was probably not hard to focus on their own game, as they highly skilled in coexistence and chaos.

Media coverage commented on Artigas’ accomplishment in addressing issues of coexistence in the Tijuana-San Diego zone. For example, American curator Jennifer Teets, wrote: “many spectators witnessed, although subtly, two strikingly innocuous, yet sublimely political acts of social compatibility/incompatibility.”¹⁵⁰

Curator Osvaldo Sánchez saw it likewise. According to him, *The Rules of the Game II* “was a highly memorable experience.” He wrote:

This event transformed the limits of social friction and the dynamics of border flow into a critical visualization of the possibilities of co-existence. The project demonstrated the live self-construction of the public fabric by means of a liberating experience between heterogeneous individuals in unexpected circumstances. For the attending public as well as the co-participants—high school amateur sportsmen—engaging in the performance of the game enabled a heightened understanding—through a joyful and revealing experience of the complex conditions of the region. The work was a seemingly absurd fictional

¹⁴⁹ Morgan Falconer, “Deep Play,” *Art Monthly* (274, Mar. 2004) 9.

¹⁵⁰ Jennifer Teets, “Estamos aquí para jugar o para ser serios?” *Revista Origina. Propuesta Conceptual*. (Jun. 2004).

parody whose indices of random certitude challenged and healed the entropic flows with which the border region self regulates.¹⁵¹

The Rules of the Game II puts into conflict the relationship between space and players in a common ground. The court on a high school at Tijuana became a metaphor of the nation, and although the idea of coexistence was part of Artigas' original discourse, his purpose was not of concession. As Medina notes: "There is one element in Artigas' game that carries, in its own, the promise of a political reactivation. This is a work that instead of falling into the illusion of the cessation of conflicts rather displaces them and points toward their complication."¹⁵²

The social relations Artigas investigate point to both coexistence and conflict, two indissoluble features of any social organization. The artist explains his project as being about "metaphors of relationships, or interfaces that allow us to establish links with others, links that are by nature always complex."¹⁵³ *The Rules of the Game* sought to trace a parallel to social relations within a given space beyond nationalisms.

¹⁵¹ Sánchez, "Fading Traces," 41. As a curator involved in the organization of inSite who actually is based in Tijuana and Mexico City, Sánchez has stated that Artigas' piece was so important that it impacted the curatorial framework of the next edition of inSite in 2005.

¹⁵² Cuauhtémoc Medina, "Chasing a Ball in the Political Field," Practice and Criticism in Latin America. The Center for Curatorial Studies. Bard College, New York. 23 Mar. 2001. Lecture.

¹⁵³ Gustavo Artigas, "The Rules of the Game," *InSite 2000-01* (26 March 2001).

Conclusion

Based on the journey people from Mexico are forced to undertake in order to change their material conditions, I have investigated the discourse of the nation that constructed the United States fence to restrict the mobility of people from Latin American countries. On a social level, the same discourse has created frictions and conflicts for the nation is imagined as a coherent, homogeneous, and unchanging community. This is despite how the global economy promotes the mobility of capital, while it reinforces borders and restricts immigration, based on the nation-state paradigm.

The aim of this thesis has been to analyze three different art projects on the Tijuana-San Diego border, as they call attention to problematics of the Mexico-United States border as a whole. The main connection between Valeska Soares' *Picturing Paradise*, Judi Werthein's *Brinco*, and Gustavo Artigas' *The Rules of the Game* is the nation-state, the paradigm that legitimates the existence and construction of this boundary. As a way of conclusion, I discuss some of the similarities and differences between these three case studies.

First, the main subject these projects address are different, although interconnected. *Picturing Paradise* focuses on physical and psychological fences, whereas *Brinco* explores the relationship between illegal immigration and globalization. Werthein's project is related to the act of jumping and/or crossing the fence and the intersection of this activity with the economy of both countries. On the other hand, *The Rules of the Game I* – the public court at Colonial Libertad – deals with spatiality and the

border fence as subject matter, while *The Rules of the Game II*, examines social relations, conflict and coexistence in border cities.

Second, the material and conceptual elements vary, depending on the artists' strategies and scope of the projects themselves. *Picturing Paradise* consists of two mirrors installed on the border fence between Playas de Tijuana and Border State Field Park, a few steps away from the Pacific Ocean. The mirrors were placed on the left and right side of a monument that literally states the limits of the territory of the Mexico and the United States. Also, Calvino's text adds another level to the work as it suggests the relationship between people and space, moving the discussion toward social relations in border cities. However, this artwork is also poetic, for the mirror "fuses" the fence with reflecting images of the sky, the beach and the landscape of Border State Field Park. It is a subtle yet political gesture because the visual effect of transparency symbolically erases a section of one of the most patrolled and restricted borders in the world.

In contrast, *Brinco* is an object of use and consumption, a discourse that concentrates the global realities in a sneaker shoe. It is active and provocative - a controversial art object that co-opts the strategy of transnational companies to create a trademark of limited edition sneakers. Werthein deployed the design as provocation and created a pair of sneakers with values for two different target audiences: a utilitarian value for people intending to illegally cross the Mexico-United States border and a commercial value as a product for consumers shopping in San Diego. The execution of the project, both in design and distribution literally provoked the media, who immediately covered the story. The artist was aware of this situation and she played the game very well, attending every interview she was called in for. The result was a free campaign for

her project that reached an international audience. One after another, media personalities questioned her for helping immigrants and one by one she answered that she was just an artist addressing a problem. The most important point is how her work embodied the “immigrant’s tragedy” through a pair of shoes. In my interview with her, she commented how, in one of the TV shows, she was accused by the interviewer of committing a federal crime. But when the commercial came on and they were off air, the same man asked her how much the shoes cost, and if he could get a pair for free for his son. The story of this and other situations are what makes this project activist, precisely when the object gets removed from the art world and is totally absorbed by the market, returning to Mexico as funds are donated to non-profit institutions to help immigrants. To be clear, however, the activism of the project is not in the act of fundraising, but in bringing forward consumerism and making evident the exploitation of the American economy through this pair of sneakers.

Artigas’ *The Rules of the Game I* is a public court created to activate the Colonia Libertad and to engage the community. The dimensions of this work are particularly remarkable as the bright green wall, taller than the actual fence, disrupted the presence of the political border fence. The public basketball and handball court acted as a disturbing element, foreign to the metal fence. In that sense this work is similar to *Picturing Paradise*, for both were installed on the Tijuana-Sand Diego border fence. The main difference, though, is that Artigas’ court was an active space, in which the children and youth of the Colonia Libertad - as well as any other visitor who would want to - were able to play.

In contrast, Artigas' *The Rules of the Game II*, involving the simultaneous match between two American basketball teams and two Mexican soccer teams, is a performance-event that uses spectacle as strategy and medium. It is a large-scale artwork which entailed the participation of players, referees and narrators from both sides of the border and thus required a more complex level of organization than the other two projects by Soares and Werthein. Although Werthein's project also required the collaboration of many people during the process— from the research and the manufacturing of the product to its distribution in Tijuana and San Diego – the strategies in and audiences for *Brinco* and *The Rules of the Game* are very different. *Brinco*'s strategy is based on the design and the issues it addresses, while the audiences it targets are illegal immigrants in Tijuana and consumers in San Diego. In contrast, Artigas' strategy was about creating a spectacular event that large and diverse audiences from both sides of the border attended. This sports event involved its audiences in a confusing spectacle in which two nations were confronted and challenged to share the same playground. More than coexistence, what Artigas revealed with this project was a parallel disorganization and dysfunction, contradiction and chaos, a mirror reflecting society.

Finally, the three artworks share a common critique to the nation-state. Soares' installation illustrates how the border fence is constructed, reinforced and patrolled based on this paradigm and critically challenges the existence of the border and the ideology that constructed it, thus by extension, the nation-state. As nations are imagined as coherent spaces shared by a homogeneous people, there is no place for difference. My analysis discussed how Soares' deploys the mirror as strategy to show the nation as an arbitrary construct that works within realms of power.

Wertheim's *Brinco* also deals with this issue by illustrating the experience of people who is considered undesirable (illegal-others) to the nation. At the same time, this project reveals the contradictions of the American economy in relation to issues of immigration and control of borders. Consider, for instance, Nevins' discussion of how these oppositions operate:

A variety of interest—both domestic and foreign—limited the ability (and desire) of the American state to achieve full control over the boundary. This phenomenon relates to the somewhat conflicting functions of the modern territorial state of “protecting” national territory from putative threats from without while trying to maximize potential benefits for domestic interest of transnational flows. Depending on the interest group and the larger socio economic and political context, international migrant labor represents both a threat to and an opportunity for the “nation.”¹⁵⁴

Brinco revealed this paradox and was rendered more complex when analyzed in relation to global politics.

On the other hand, Artigas' sports event and public court exemplify how the idea of citizenship and the delimitation of the territory are encompassed in the nation and create social frictions, nationalisms and racisms negotiated and challenged in border cities. Nationalisms are called into question in the Tijuana-San Diego border region, for the border is supposed to divide the two nations and the citizens who live on each of them. However, as Nevins states, the Mexico-U.S. boundary “has not only helped to divide the people of Mexico and the United States, but also brought them together,

¹⁵⁴ Nevins, Operation Gatekeeper, 16.

specially in the border region.”¹⁵⁵ Perhaps the most important aspect of Artigas’ *The Rules of the Game II* is in making this evident and stressing the differences within nations.

The juxtaposition of *Picturing Paradise*, *Brinco*, and *The Rules of the Game* renders the issue of borders more complex. In fact, the selection of these three case studies focused on works that address the politics of the Tijuana-San Diego border zone. However, this is not to say the selection was reduced to “political art.” The artworks were selected to examine some of the problems of this border, critically exposing the complexity of the immigration issue and more specifically to address the historic and ideological formation of the border and the nation-state.

The study of these contemporary art projects offers an exemplary account of border art practices. InSite has encouraged artists from different countries to explore the Tijuana-San Diego border. However, although each border has its own narratives, the U.S.-Mexican border encapsulates common thematics and problems with other borders; it is exemplary of global politics and contemporary migrancy.¹⁵⁶ The study of these three projects thus illustrates the border issue as a whole and links it to the global. Stefano Boeri wrote that the twentieth-century utopia was based on “fluidity,” yet on closer scrutiny, “the result of global interconnections and movements, in fact, appears to be a proliferation of borders.”¹⁵⁷ The three case studies this thesis has analyzed speak to borders all around the world and contribute to questioning the dominant ideological structures that build and secure them.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁵⁶ See page 49, where these issues are discussed.

¹⁵⁷ Stefano Boeri, “Borders Syndrome. Notes for a Research Program,” *Territories: Islands, Camps, and Other States of Utopia*, ed. Anselm Franke, Rafi Segal et al. (Köln: König, 2003) 52.

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PLATES

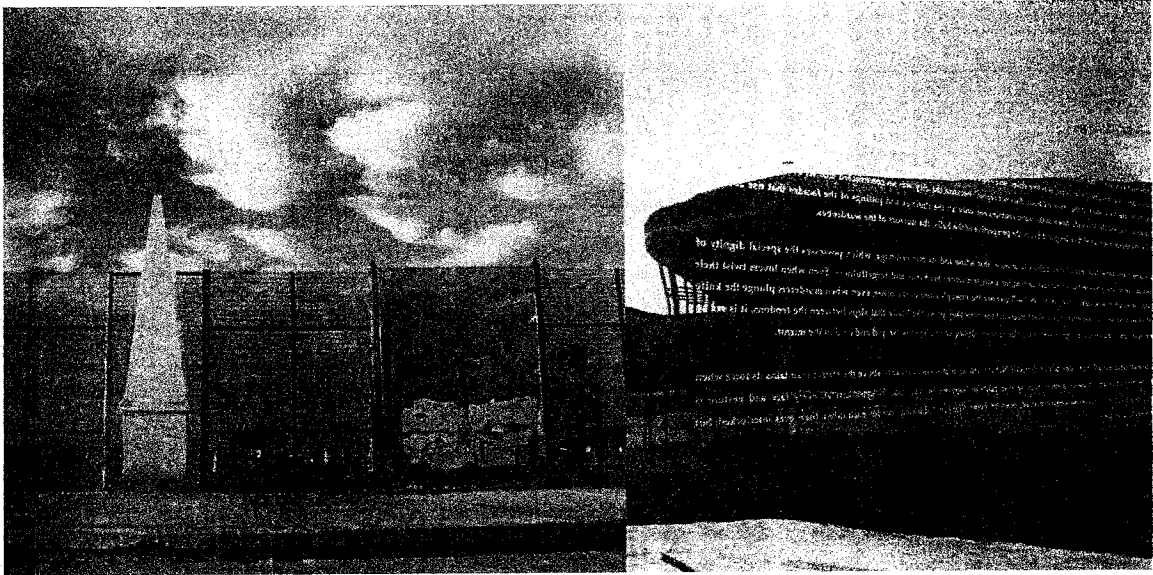


fig 1

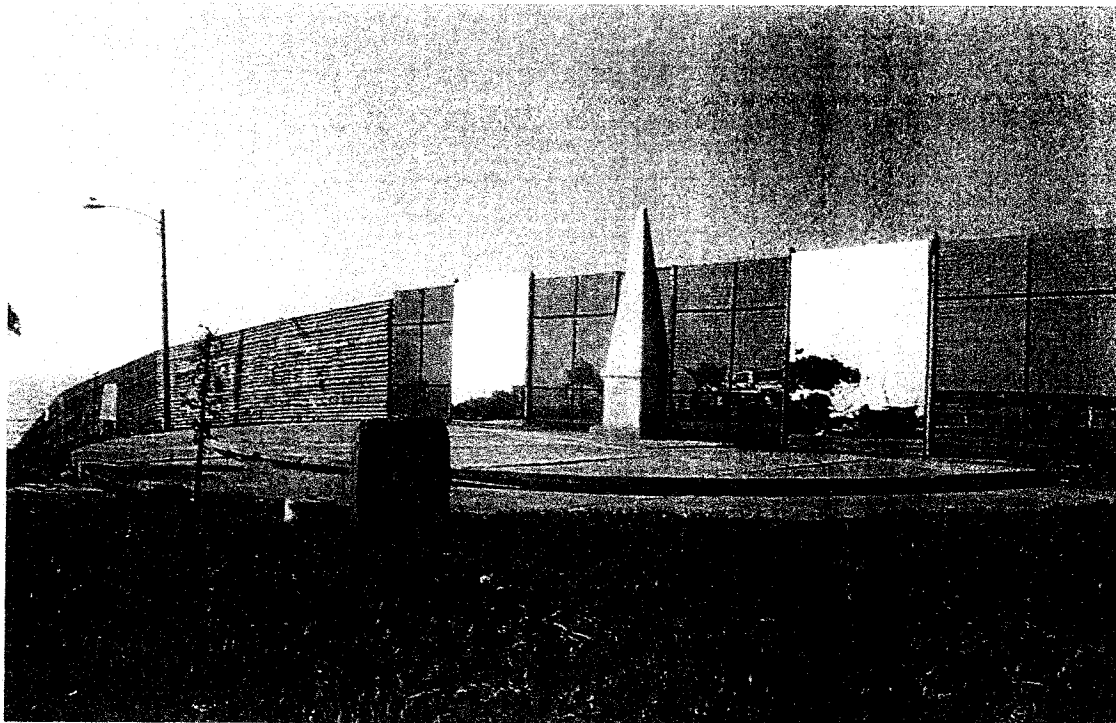


fig 2

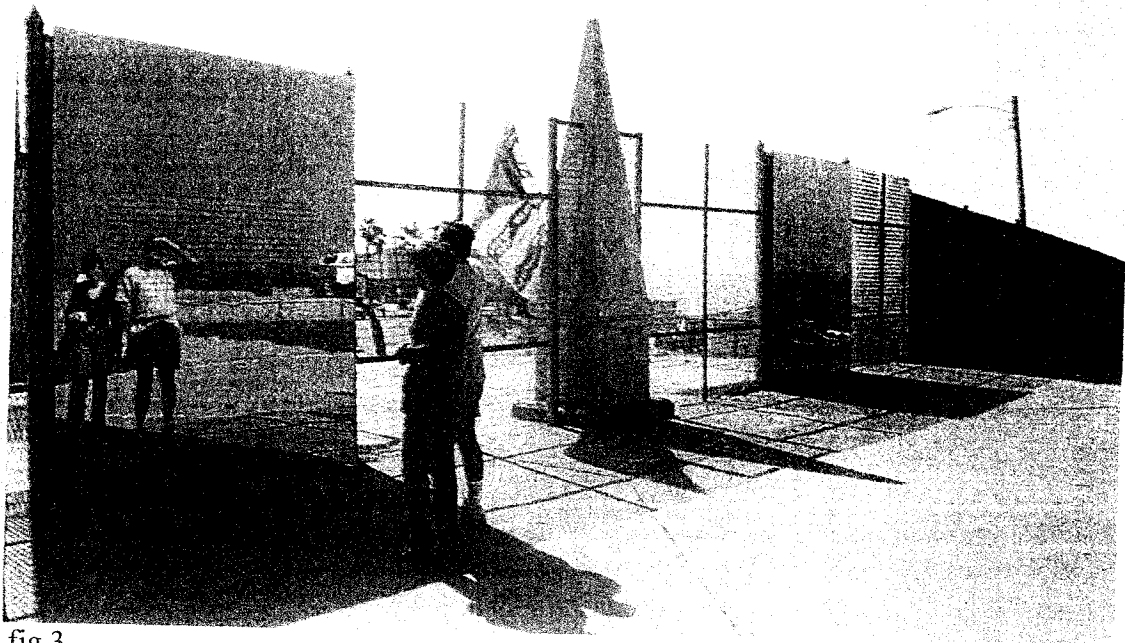


fig 3



fig 4

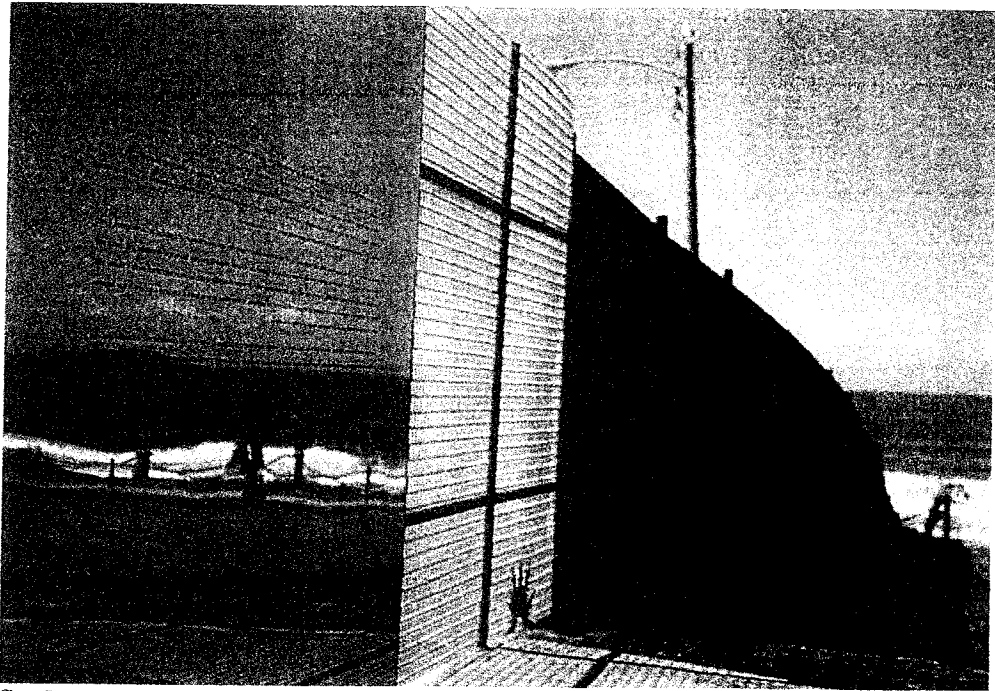


fig 5

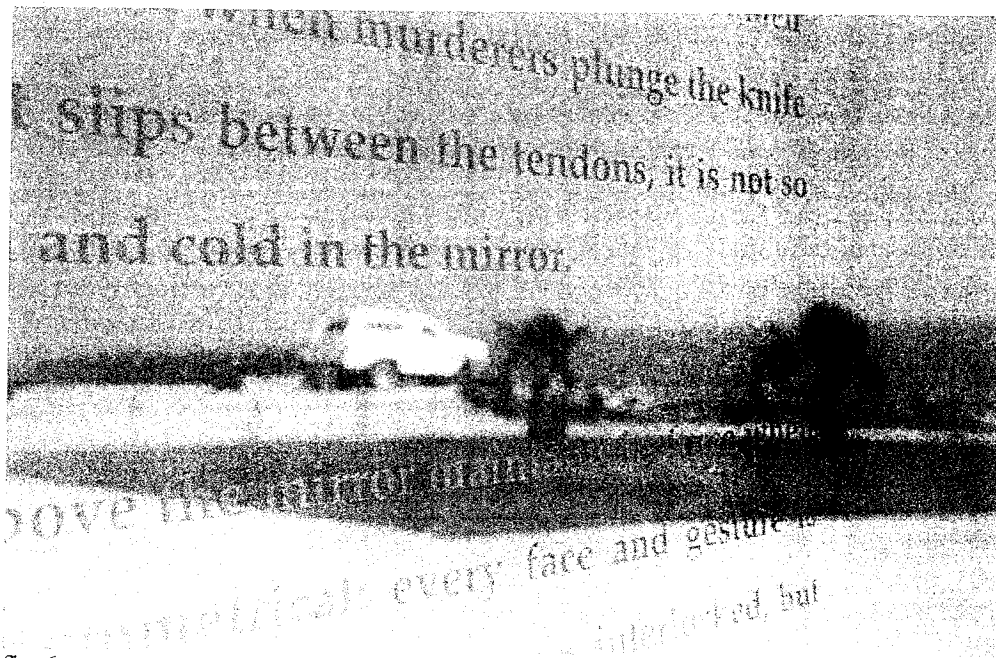


fig 6

Brinco ★

After 1970, strange things started happening in the border crossing the United States and Mexico. Hundreds of immigrants were being reported that whatever they found themselves in, there's a strange Mexican priest, called Father Romeo would suddenly appear and help them cross the border. Even giving them food, water, money, and sometimes an hour to get into the United States. Strange things started happening, starting from that afternoon, one's piece, the other information. He asked them, "What's the name of the priest?" He said, "He was a Mexican priest, not a guardian angel."

Peck's

Compass and mini flashlight

Symbol of the Mexican people

Map of the area printed on the other side

Minuteman logo, original design for Great Britain

Lines of the shoe revealing the manufacturing conditions

fig 7

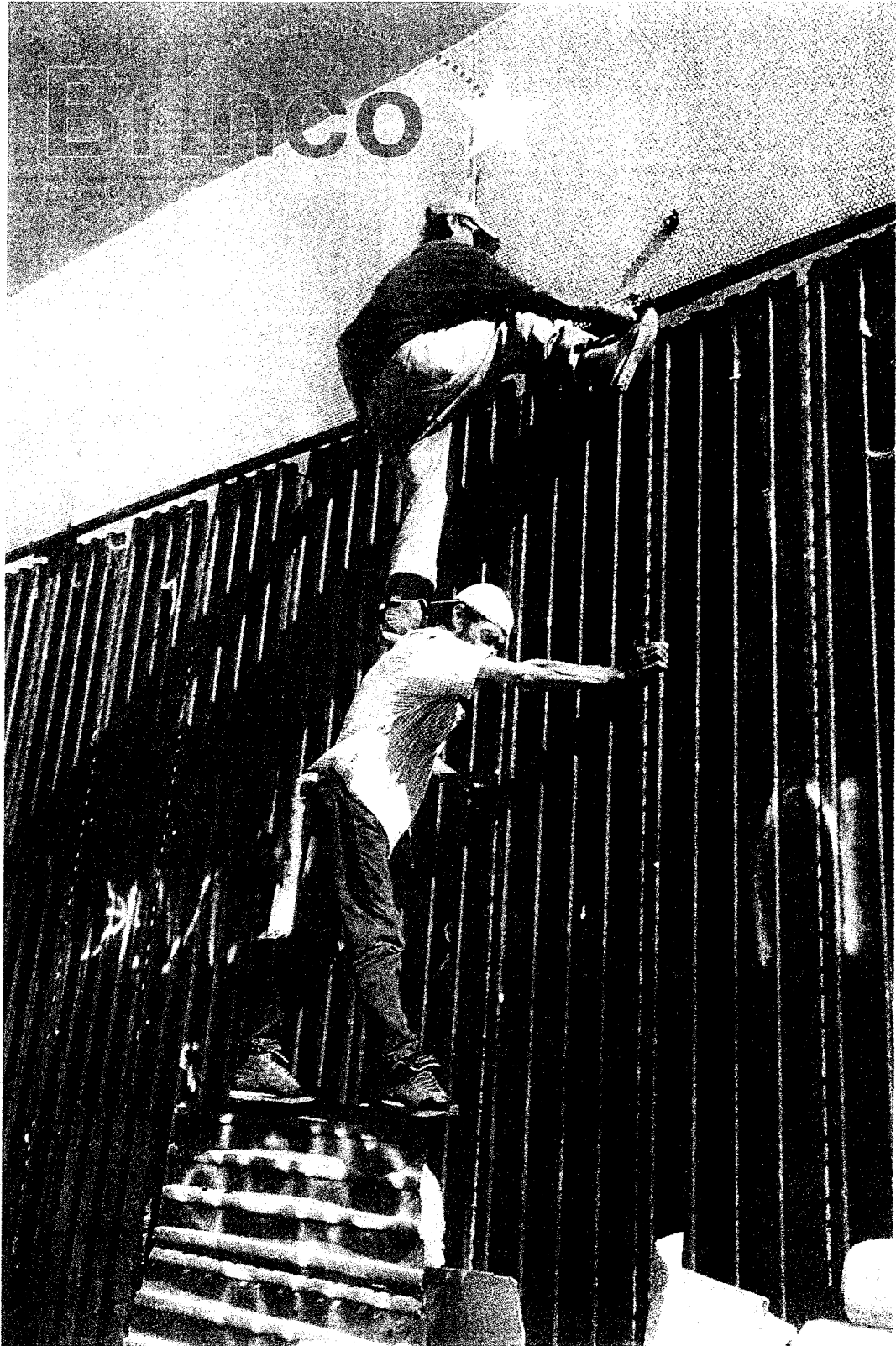


fig 8

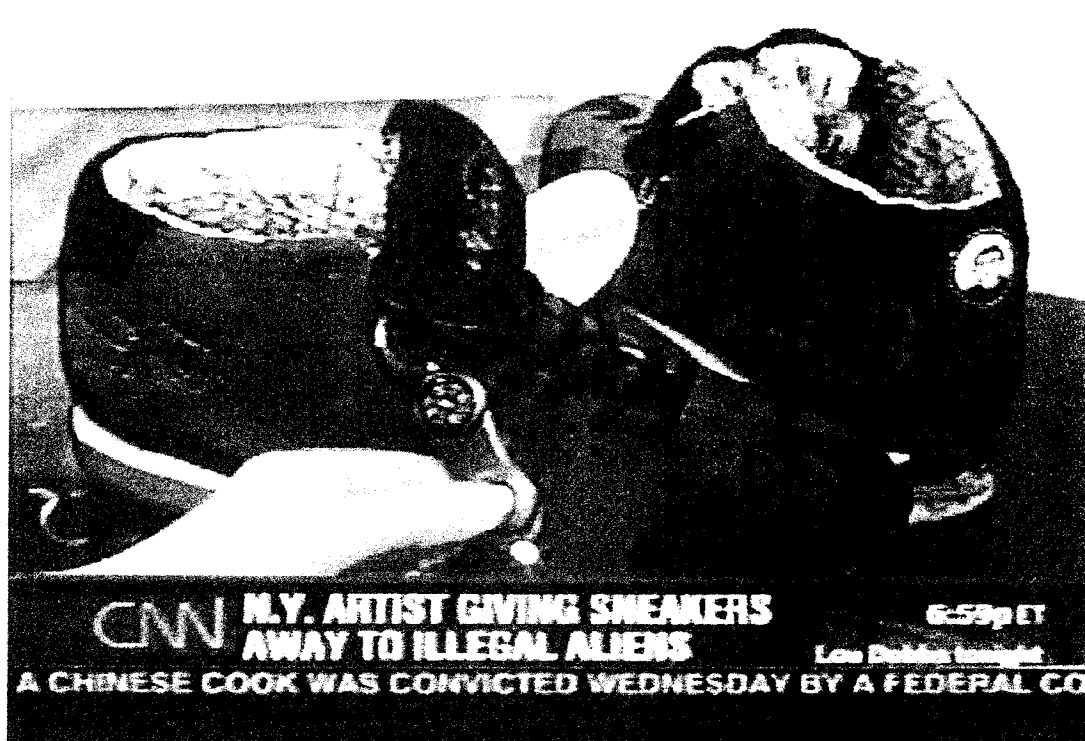


fig 9



fig 9

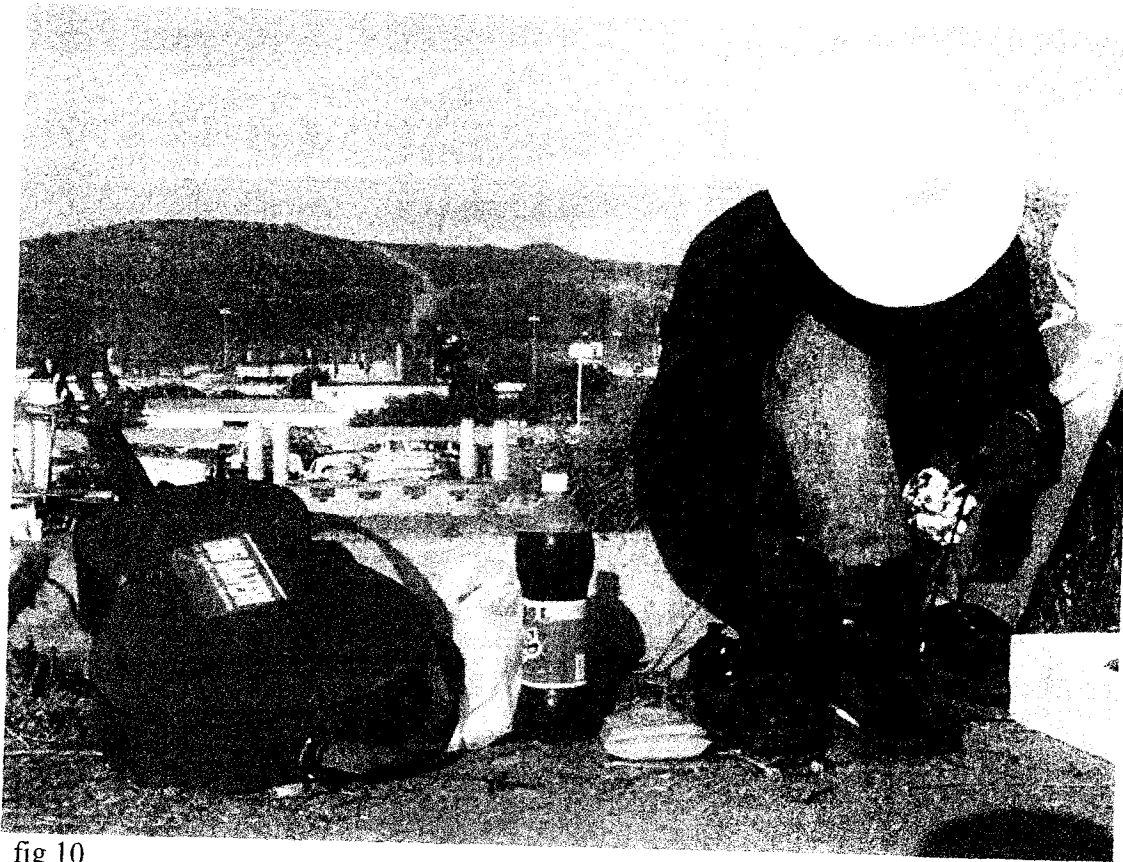


fig 10



fig 12

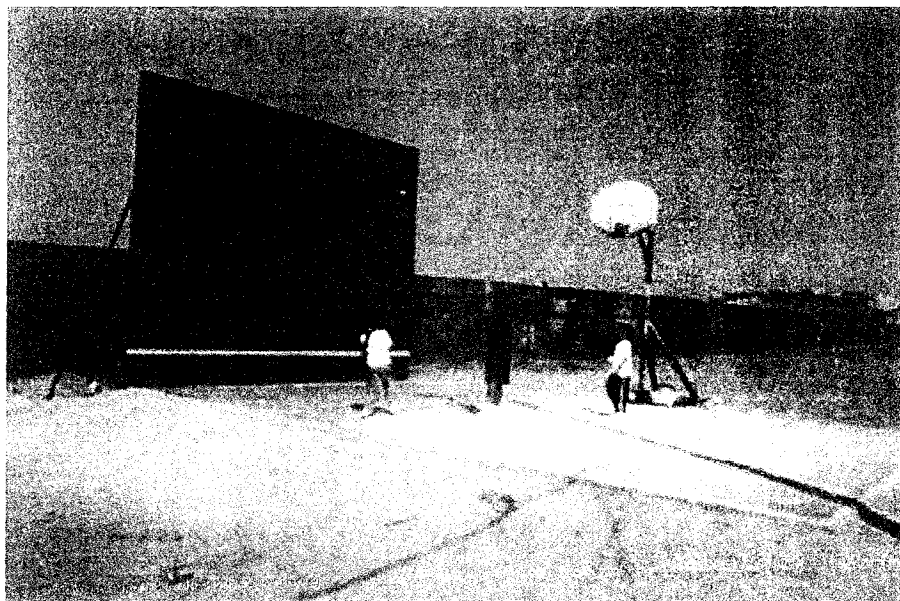


fig 13

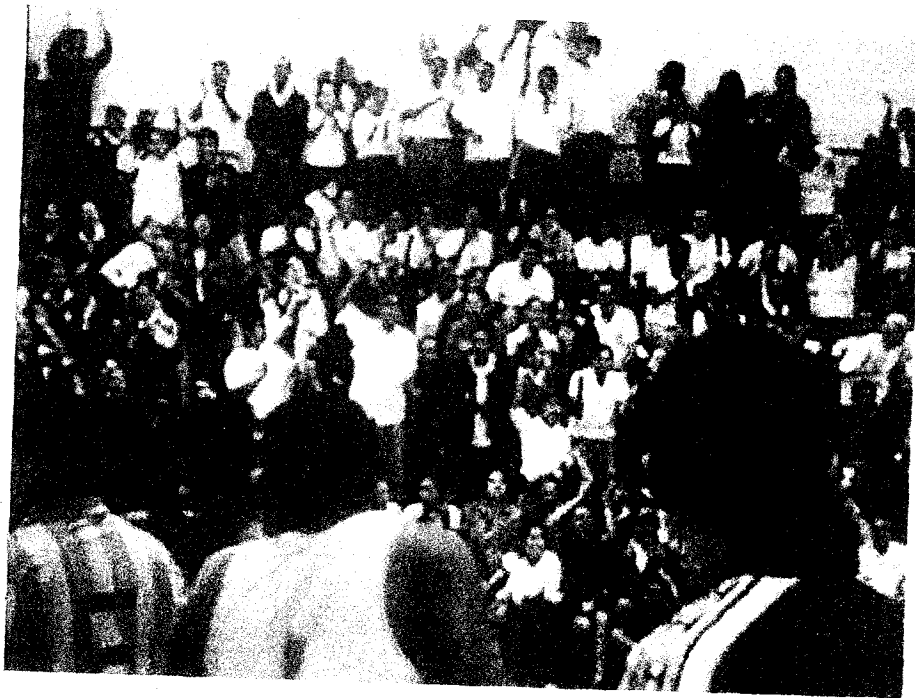


fig 14

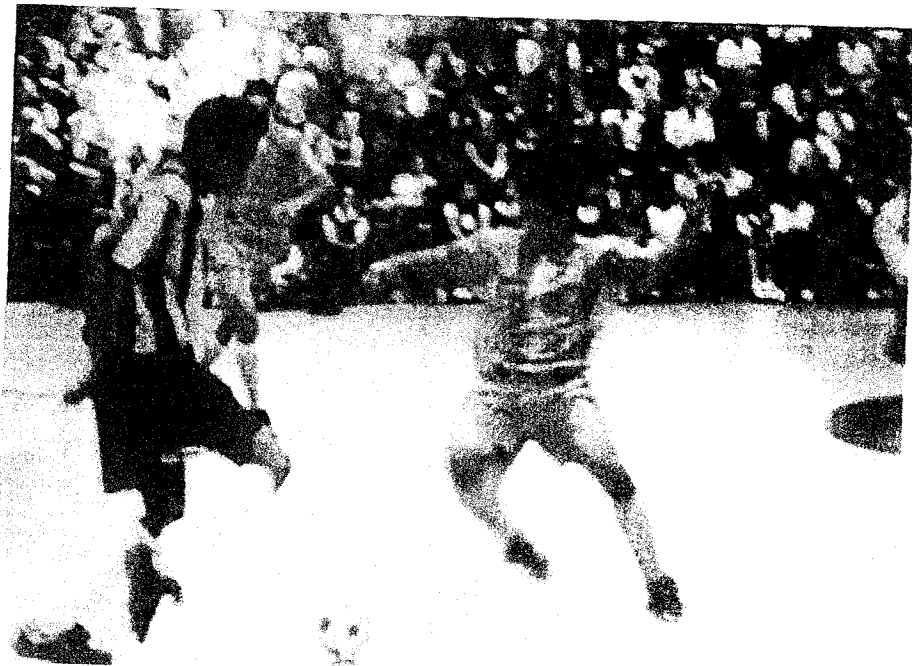


fig 15