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Date

Entre Líneas | Between Lines: Mobility, Temporality, and Performance at a Mexico-U.S.  
Border Checkpoint

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Mael Vizcarra  
B.A., Brown University, 2009

Advisor: Anna Grimshaw, Ph.D.

An abstract of  
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## Abstract

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Border Checkpoint  
By Mael Vizcarra

This dissertation rethinks the notion of border by exploring how mobility, temporality and performance happen in the border checkpoint of *la Línea* in Tijuana, Mexico. Using a phenomenological filmic approach, I examine the contrasting movements, temporal rhythms, and performances of two groups: 1) vendors, whose free movements around the border emphasize spatial preoccupations, and 2) border crossers, whose limited mobility highlights the importance of time. For border crossers, the checkpoint represents a liminal space of waiting as they stand in long lines to cross the border. For vendors, the site is a destination where many have worked for generations. While crossers are mobile in the sense of their daily movement across borders, they remain relatively immobile in this site as they wait in line. Vendors do not generally cross the border and are perceived to be permanent fixtures, yet they are hyper mobile when compared to crossers, spending much of their time walking around. Examining border crossers' and vendors' contrasting experiences of movement and time in the space of the *Línea* reveals important information about the nature of borders, and prompts us to question our understanding of the relationship between privilege and mobility. *La Línea* can also be understood as a theatrical space for spectacle, everyday ritual, and various other performances. The large mass of people engaged in daily commuting represent a spectacular display in itself. The site is both visually imposing and provides a large captive audience of viewers, which has led to the site's use as a performance stage by local artists. Moreover, the line between performer and audience here is blurred as vendors, crossers, and CBP agents simultaneously perform for, observe, and surveil one another. Like movement and time, these different performance elements become 'mixed up' in this site, creating various lines beyond the geopolitical border. I propose the concept of *revolver* (to mix, to stir) to think through the shifting dynamics of mobility, temporality, and performance taking place between these lines.

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*A todos los que se ganan la vida trabajando la Línea,  
comerciendo y haciendo fila todos los días,  
éste trabajo es una ofrenda a sus labores.*



## Introduction

It is simply a matter of freeing the line, of revivifying its constituting power [...] as Klee said, the line no longer imitates the visible, it “renders visible,” it is the sketch of a genesis of things. Perhaps no one before Klee had “let a line dream.”

--Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Eye and Mind*

Kino-eye is the documentary cinematic decoding of both the visible world and that which is invisible to the naked eye

--Dziga Vértov, *Kinoks: A Revolution*

Liminality is the realm of primitive hypothesis, where there is a certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence.

--Victor Turner, *Betwixt and Between*

There is no *one* border experience, ‘cause it’s different for every person. Just like anything else. There is no *one* way to do or be anything.

--Evelyn, in conversation

“I wrote a song about the border,” Damian said. “*The border?* What border do you mean?” I asked. “The border, the border,” he quickly replied, “When I say the border, I mean *the* border. The only border there is—*la Línea* (the Line)!” I assumed he had meant *la Línea* but I couldn’t be sure. The word in English contains all of the meanings that in Spanish become other words: *frontera* (frontier), *borde* (edge), *límite* (limit), or *confín* (confine). I wondered if his song was about a conceptual border, so I asked for clarification. Damian returned to speaking Spanish so he could be more specific. *La Línea!* he said, raising his voice, annoyed I had asked such an obvious question.<sup>1</sup>

His statement solidified something I had known all along but, like every other *tijuanaense*, had never bothered to question. In Tijuana, the border of the collective imagination, the only border that “exists” is *la Línea*, the border checkpoint. It is concrete, visible, ever-present and for border crossers like Damian, a pain in the ass. *La frontera*—that other border—is the rusted metal and concrete double fence that cut the region in half. You drive next to it; you see the row of large lights at night from downtown; you stare at the metal pillars that extend into the Pacific Ocean; you notice it out in the middle of the desert when you travel east. But that border, while also here, is *over there*. Despite its visual and physical imposition, it still manages to exist in the abstract in the collective imaginary because most people rarely interact with it. You don’t touch that border; you look out the window and remember what side of the fence you’re on.<sup>2</sup> And while I sit here conceptualizing “border,” people are also working, waiting, and living it every day. The

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of this text include ‘Spanglish’ or ‘code-switch’ half way through a sentence. When appropriate, I provide the original statement followed by a parenthetical translation. All translations are my own unless otherwise specified.

<sup>2</sup> This isn’t entirely true. Families gather every week at “Friendship Park” in the U.S. or ‘by the lighthouse’ in Playas de Tijuana on the Mexican side of the border wall to spend time with family members on the other side. Even here, physical contact has been increasingly restricted by U.S. Border Patrol—a metallic mesh put in place to prevent “smuggling” means families can only touch each other’s fingertips.

border is *la Línea*. The border is a line—it is *the* line. In Tijuana, that is “the only border there is.”

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*La Línea* refers to the two border checkpoints and surrounding area in Tijuana that separate the U.S. and Mexico. Here I will focus on the larger of the two, the “San Ysidro Port of Entry.”<sup>3</sup> One in ten people entering the U.S. via air, sea, or land enter through this checkpoint. Over 100,000 people cross into the U.S. in vehicles and on foot daily with average waiting times of two to four hours, making San Ysidro the most transited land border in the world (Bureau of Transportation Statistics, 2015). Most border crossers are local international commuters traveling to San Diego for work, school, or shopping. While they wait in line, more than 1,000 vendors make a living selling a variety of food, goods, and services to them. They do so on foot, on carts, and in the market sitting between the car lanes leading to the U.S. customs inspections booths.

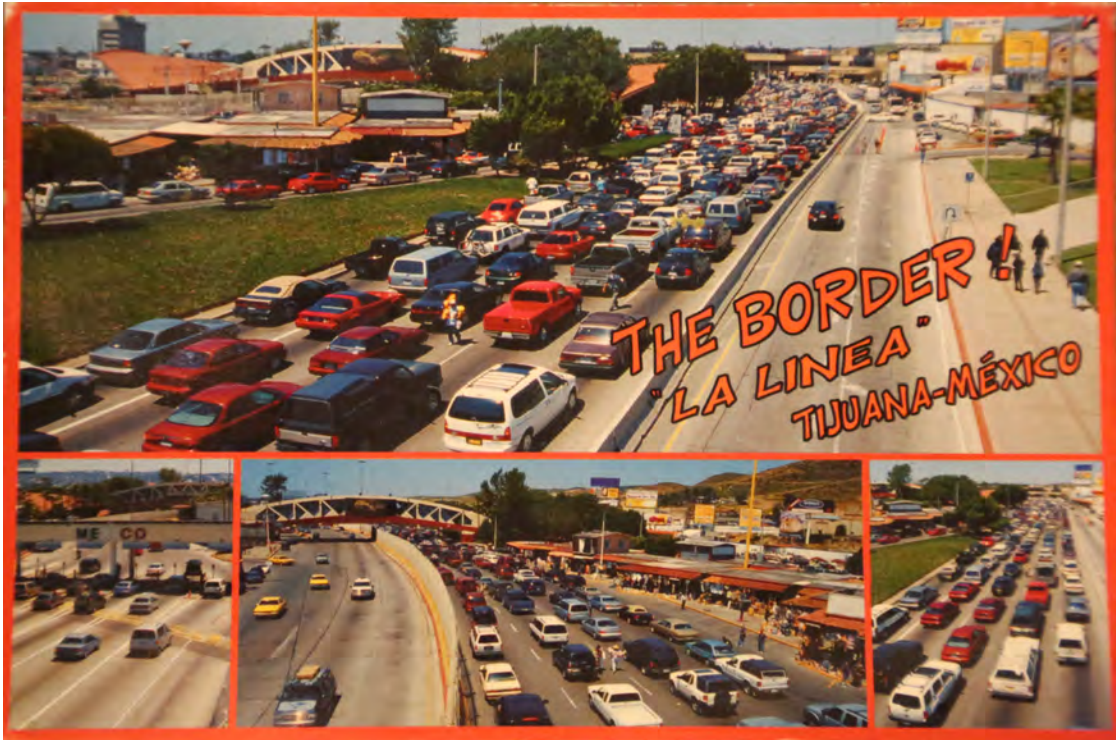


Bird's eye view of la Línea, from Google Maps, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> I will be using the local terms of “the border,” “*la/the Línea*,” “the Line” interchangeably throughout the text to mean the border checkpoint and the surrounding area south where people work and wait in line.



Looking south. The market is highlighted in yellow. From Aerial Archives, 2012.





Postcards of the Linea.

These aerial images show the magnitude and size of the site, and the daily traffic that transits through it. The geopolitical line divides the landscape of crowded urbanity on the Mexican side and a mostly uninhabited countryside on the U.S. side. The checkpoint and the roads leading up them leave their mark on the geography. A closer look reveals a tapering strip of buildings headed by a park, splitting the traffic in half. But what's more noticeable when one looks closer are the cars—lines and lines of cars. In fact, two of the postcards showcase vehicular traffic. In these postcard photographs, the border is featured as a spectacle—one to be shared with others—bringing attention to the volume of cars, but also to the status of Tijuana as a border city. The images celebrate the spectacular scale of the border and the enduring daily movement across it. They affirm that a defining characteristic of the city is its adjacency to the U.S. The emphasis on south to north movement—on border crossings—visible in these images from above is also reflected in public discussions about the border. Radio traffic reports on both sides of the border provide waiting time estimates (in Tijuana,

this is the only traffic reporting that is done). Facebook groups and websites also offer this information. Issues of border crossing—namely, the time it takes to cross—dominate any conversation about the Line. From an aerial perspective the focus is on broad movements—in this case of people, but other times of goods—and the speed of their movement. Despite this emphasis, these images are mostly devoid of people, neither drivers nor vendors, nor U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents, are visible. These visions of the site focused on mobility and time imply the physical body, but ignore its presence, making it easier to forget or ignore the experience of thousands of people who spend hours here every day.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980/2011), Michel de Certeau argues that approaching the urban landscape through a bird's eye view is problematic because this perspective reflects the kinds of manipulation and imposition the powerful execute on spaces. Urban planners, government officials, even theorists, often choose this view from above because it offers a privileged position that fulfills desires for order and totalization, one that deploys visual metaphors of making information and knowledge 'visible' by 'seeing the whole.' Theorists, he says, should refuse this power-laden gaze and instead seek to learn from quotidian practices on the ground, or "tactics"—the small everyday occurrences and ways of 'making do' the weak use to resist the disciplining impositions on space made by the powerful. He explains, "Escaping the imaginary totalizations produced by the eye, the everyday has a certain strangeness that does not surface, or whose surface is only its upper limit, outlining itself against the visible" (1980/2011, p. 93). De Certeau shifts the focus from knowledge that comes from looking from above to the epistemological importance of stories, myths, and memory made on the ground, as well as walking as a practice of narration. These everyday practices are ways of knowing the city that are obscure and

invisible; under this conceptual framework it is the shadows and traces of spaces that merit our attention.



The Linea in 2010. All photographs in this dissertation are my own unless otherwise specified.





The Linea in 2014.



The Linea in 2015.







The Linea in 2016.

### **‘The Visible and the Invisible’<sup>4</sup>**

This work, too, is concerned with the “*opaque and blind* mobility” (de Certeau, 1980/2011, p. 93) of everyday practice. As an anthropological study this work is located ‘on the ground,’ but seeks to avoid a totalizing perspective while there. This emphasis on opaqueness follows phenomenological and sensorial approaches in anthropology that are concerned with grounding conceptualizations in concrete engagements and never reducing experience—or the world—to theories that attempt to fix or typify its meaning. “Tendencies toward abstraction, ossification, and totalization [are] held to be problematic,” Desjarlais & Throop (2011) explain, “unless, of course, such processes are examined in concrete moments of interaction and engagement” (pg. 96). The preoccupation with ‘grounding’ theory reflects anthropology’s longstanding concern with the method of participant observation and issues of representation, or ‘bridging the gap’ between the experience of being in the field and the subsequent writing intended to represent some of that experience. Indeed, part of what makes phenomenological anthropology distinct from other phenomenological approaches is anthropology’s insistence on “the empirical data of ethnography” (Katz & Csordas, 2003, p. 278). The opaque, the “everyday [...] strangeness that does not surface,” that “[outlines] itself against the visible” (de Certeau, 1980/2011, p. 93) speaks to the ambiguities and indeterminate nature of experience described by phenomenologists and anthropologists in the field. But then, how does one communicate these invisibilities inherent to experience? Can the ‘invisible’ be made ‘visible’ without losing its opaque quality?

The sense that everyday life is ambiguous and uncertain (mysterious, even), describes a kind of “excess” attributed not only to lived experience, but to borders and images as well.

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<sup>4</sup> I borrow these terms from phenomenologist philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s (1964/1968) final and incomplete work by the same name.

In the context of phenomenology, Jackson explains that “To fully recognize the eventfulness of being is to discover that what emerges in the course of any human interaction overflows, confounds, and goes beyond the forms that initially frame the interaction as well as the reflections and rationalizations that follows from it” (2012, p. 255). Inherent to this quality of excess is the recognition that the worlds we live in and our encounters (with ourselves, with others, with objects, with the environment) are always in flux and therefore uncertain. A similar phenomenon occurs with borders—conceptually and geographically speaking. Their in-between nature creates slippages and ambiguity, yet these same ambivalences are what borders work to contain. Borders thus open and attempt to contain their own meaning, endlessly exceeding themselves. The same can be said about images, which straddle the line between concreteness and abstractness, between typification and generalization. To study everyday life at the border anthropologically then means foregrounding these excesses—in/of borders, as well as in the conceptual and methodological approaches to their study. This project thus takes up a phenomenological approach to the study of borders that includes the visual practice of filmmaking as a central methodology.

Borne out of this shadowy strangeness, on the line between what we are able and unable to know, the underpinning theme of this project is precisely this tension between the visible and invisible. A phenomenological perspective embraces this tension and an anthropologist struggles to represent it. As a ‘*tijuanaense* returned’<sup>5</sup>, I struggle further to represent the foreign land where I came of age; a task made more difficult by the ways the city of Tijuana has already been imagined from the outside. Given all of this, my guiding motivation has been to find and share some of what’s been hidden about Tijuana, and specifically, the invisibilities around the border. This said, I’m not attempting to “capture” an

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<sup>5</sup> I left Tijuana in 2005, returning only to visit family twice a year, until I moved back in 2014.

essence of place, but am rather interested in how events, people, circumstances, etc., come into being in the process of writing and image-making, in the process of my work. What I mean is that I'm not interested in capturing *what is already there*—this would not only be an impossible task, but also a prescriptive one that betrays the openness and open-ended nature of experience and the border. I'm rather *creating with* what I found there, which is another way of saying I'm reflecting on what I and others lived in the hopes that doing so will help me find something of meaning for us all.

Thus my intention has been to “evoke” some of the life of the border rather than “represent” it. Anthropologist Stephen Tyler (1986) discusses ethnographic “evocation” as being “neither presentation nor representation. It presents no objects and represents none, yet it makes available through absence what can be conceived but not presented” (p. 123). Furthermore, “since evocation is nonrepresentational, it is not to be understood as a sign function, for it is not a ‘symbol of,’ nor does it ‘symbolize’ what it evokes” (Tyler, 1986, p. 129). Evocation, as a movement from perception to ideation that doesn't confine meaning or make it fully legible, provides a way of making the opaque visible. Rather than creating yet another representation of Tijuana, this project hopes to evoke some of its life lived. Put another way, as a written and visual work, this dissertation takes seriously the descriptive art of ethnography,<sup>6</sup> where the starting point for such a description is an understanding of the world as one “that already coheres, where things and events occur or *take place*, rather than a world of disconnected particulars that has to be rendered coherent, or joined up after the fact, in the theoretical imagination” (Ingold, 2008, p. 73). Anthropology's foundational interest was finding the commonalities of human experience across different cultures. While this has shifted due to a broader focus on difference and the social construction of culture,

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<sup>6</sup> “The objective of ethnography is to describe the lives of people other than ourselves, with an accuracy and sensitivity honed by detailed observation and prolonged first-hand experience” (Ingold, 2008, p. 69).



the preoccupation with how the 'general' relates to the 'particular' of human experience remains. The idea is that general social theory will be grounded in the particular context where one does anthropology. But the move to generalization often means that context first gets split up into 'disconnected particulars' in order to 'render it coherent' through social theory. This problem is rooted in an enduring Cartesian spatial imagination that elevates the head, the mind, and the social realm over the feet, the body, and the ground where life is lived (Ingold, 2004). To conceive of the world as already spatially integrated would be to notice instead how "the singular phenomenon opens up as you go deeper into it, rather than being eclipsed from above" (Ingold, 2008, p. 75). The challenge for the ethnographer then is finding a way to describe this living, composite, and ever unfolding world without fixing and confining it through representation, and without dissecting it to death.

Visual anthropologists have wrestled with some of the formal and ethical issues around representation long before 'textual' anthropologists. This is in large part due to the nature of images. With regard to the distinction between the 'particular' and the 'general' in images and writing, ethnographic filmmaker David MacDougall notes, "writing is general is its use of widely applicable signs (the system of words) and its capacity for abstract expression, whereas pictures are general in their representation of the physical continuities of the world" (1998, p. 246). That is, images efficiently signal human "ways of appearing, making, and doing," and writing ways of "naming, conceptualizing, and believing" (MacDougall, 1998, p.259). Given the dominance of the written word in the discipline, and the movement away from 'folklorism' and 'salvage ethnography', many visible characteristics of experience in the world are now often taken for granted in anthropological writing or go unmentioned for the sake of economy. Furthermore, the visible is increasingly seen as an expression of some hidden primary order (MacDougall, 1998, p.259). In other words, what

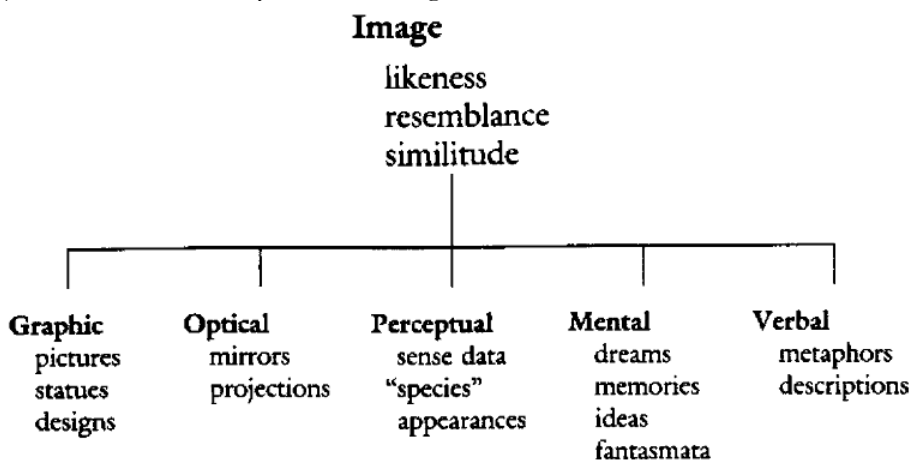
matters most is ‘uncovering’ the secret ways society is organized, schemas understood to exist in an invisible realm quite distinct from the physical world. All of this has exaggerated the emphasis on the construction of cultural difference, which has in many ways deepened the divide between “self” and “other,” a distinction that has undergone much criticism because it risks objectification. Despite the call to ‘write against culture’ and to produce instead “ethnographies of the particular” (Abu-Lughod, 1991), scant attention has been paid to the ways images make the continuities and commonalities of human experience visible. In fact, a visual perspective, MacDougall argues, challenges not only the notion of cultural difference that is foundational to the discipline, but the notion of boundaries themselves (1998, p. 259). It’s this inherent tension between images and writing, as well as images’ undisciplined excess and irreducibility to a single discourse (their indexical openness) what has positioned them as a threat to the anthropological project, resulting in a general disciplinary “iconophobia” (Taylor, 1996; also Grimshaw, 2001; MacDougall, 1998).

At this point I should clarify a few things. The metaphor of vision, of seeing as a way of understanding, lies at the center of anthropology<sup>7</sup>. This is distinct from, albeit related to, the act of seeing as an ethnographic method and practice. These anthropological “ways of seeing” inform one another and manifest the beliefs behind our approach to the world (Grimshaw, 2001). This movement or (metaphorical) ‘transfer’ from the act of seeing to seeing as knowledge, from the real to the imagined, from the visible to the invisible, has been a source of much thought and debate since ancient times. I’m referring to the intertwined notions of and distinction between ‘image’ and ‘idea,’ where ‘image’ means ‘idea,’ and ‘idea’

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<sup>7</sup> Fabian (1983) has critiqued the centrality of vision in anthropology, following a longer trend that distrusts the eye and the position of vision at the top of a hierarchy of the senses in Western thought. More recently, Stoller’s (1997) call for “sensuous scholarship” argues the epistemological importance of the ‘lower’ senses, a sensibility he articulates earlier as a “radical empiricism” (1992) in the films of ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch. My own emphasis on vision and the visual is not a way of claiming its supremacy, per se. Following the work of Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012) and other phenomenologists, I see vision as “distinct and indiscernible” from the other senses as they are experienced through the body.

is itself etymologically rooted in the Greek verb ‘to see.’ ‘Idea’ is also related to ‘imitation’ and mimesis, and so the paradox of ‘image’ and ‘text,’ and semiotics and deconstruction, become wrapped up in this too. In answering what an image is, art historian W. J. T. Mitchell (1986, p. 10) constructs a “family tree” of images:



This chart presents literal uses of the word to the left, figurative uses to the right, and perceptual notions as somewhere in-between,<sup>8</sup> only to argue that ‘images proper’ (literal images) “are not stable, static, or permanent in any metaphysical sense; they are not perceived in the same way by viewers any more than are dream images; and they are not exclusively visual in any important way, but involve multisensory apprehension and interpretation” (Mitchell, 1986, p.14). An insistence on one notion of image over another has more to do with the specific agenda (conceptual ‘purity’ or disciplinary boundary maintenance, etc.) of the writer than with some inherent formal quality of image itself. The image is thus understood as “the site of a special power that must be either contained or exploited; the image, in short, as an idol or fetish” (Mitchell, 1986, p. 151). Mitchell recounts that his study of the historical relationship between text and image reveals ‘iconophobic’ and

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<sup>8</sup> “This is the region occupied by a number of strange creatures that haunt the border between physical and psychological accounts of imagery: the ‘species’ or ‘sensible forms’ which (according to Aristotle) emanate from objects and imprint themselves on the wax-like receptacles of our senses like a signet ring; the *fantasmata*, which are revived versions of those impressions called up by the imagination in the absence of the objects that originally stimulated them...” (Mitchell, 1986, p.10.)

‘iconophilic’ rhetorics, most notably, the highly influential “rhetoric of iconoclasm” and distrust of images in the work of Karl Marx, evidenced in his concepts of ideology and commodity (notions articulated through his own use of the metaphors of *camera obscura* and the fetish-idol, respectively). As Mitchell (1994) makes clear in his later work, the “linguistic turn” that emphasized language—images as text, representations as discourses—paved the way for the “pictorial turn,” a move that underlines an ongoing generalized anxiety around the image. “In what is often characterized as an age of ‘spectacle’ (Debord), ‘surveillance’ (Foucault), and all-pervasive image-making,” Mitchell explains, “we still do not know exactly what pictures are, what their relation to language is, how they operate on observers and on the world, how their history is understood, and what is to be done with or about them” (1994, p. 13).<sup>9</sup>

Thus, in the context of a so-called pictorial moment informed by longstanding iconophobic and iconophilic traditions, we can see in the notions of ‘image’ and ‘idea’ a movement between visibility and invisibility that refers to different aspects of the same thing. On the one hand, the image lies—hiding discourse or ideology through its inherent mysterious invisible workings (Marx’s *camera obscura* and ‘fetish,’ and Baudrillard’s ‘simulacra’ can be added to the list with Debord and Foucault). The image here makes invisible through its assumed and ‘self-evident’ visibility and transparency. On the other hand, the image is a site of truth—or at least a site of discursive disruption, precisely because it *makes visible* through its invisible workings, through its obdurate opaqueness (e.g., de Certeau’s ‘tactical’ disruptions). The ‘invisible’ image, that is, the image as phantom, dream, or memory, makes visible through its freedom of form, through its ability to detach itself from the visible and at

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<sup>9</sup> It goes without saying this is a cursory and limited take on what has been a long and diverse study of images. My intent here is not to provide a complete review, but to position and clarify this project’s foundational concern with what is visible and what is not, to, in turn, better position what concerns the rest of this project.

times even move into the realm of nonrepresentation. As we will see, these different meanings behind ‘image,’ ‘idea,’ and ‘text,’ as well as the mechanism that make visible and invisible, all exist in irresolvable tension with one another.

As I mentioned earlier, I borrow the heading of “The Visible and the Invisible” from Merleau-Ponty (1964/1968), where he proposes an ontology of the “flesh.”<sup>10</sup> The foundational framework of this ontology is his notion of *chiasm*<sup>11</sup>—a bond of mutual exchange, a crisscrossing that exists between things, resulting in their ontological continuity. This happens between ‘the sentient’ (the sensing body) and ‘the sensible’ (what can be sensed or perceived, e.g., other sentient beings, things, the environment), such that what we perceive is prefigured in the movement of the body that will allow this perception to happen. Thus, the body doesn’t simply react to the world, nor does the world react to the body, rather, the body and the world are intertwined in this primordial kinship called the *chiasm*. He explains, “the look, we said, envelops, palpates, espouses the visible things. As though it were in a relation of pre-established harmony with them, as though it knew them before knowing them [...] so that finally one cannot say if it is the look or if it is the things that command” (1964/1968, p.133). This ‘pre-established harmony,’ the primordial kinship of the seen in the seeing—of the sensible in the sentient—means being in the world is characterized by an immense openness. “The openness upon the world implies that the world be and remain a horizon, not because my vision would push the world back beyond itself, but because somehow he who sees is of it and is in it” (1964/1968, p.100). In other words, the sensible isn’t ‘out there’ in objective reality waiting to be perceived, the seer and

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<sup>10</sup> “The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term “element,” in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a general thing, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an ‘element’ of Being” (p. 149).

<sup>11</sup> This term is his version of Husserl’s *Verflechtung*, or “intertwining.” Merleau-Ponty’s final chapter in *The Visible and the Invisible* is entitled “The Intertwining—The Chiasm.” His use of *chiasm* contains both the biological (genetics and optic chiasma) and literary sense of the word.

the seen are co-constitutive, ontologically continuous and reciprocal, through this chiasmic bond that makes up the “flesh” of Being.

There are chiasms everywhere; between touch and vision; between the sensible and the knowable, and of course, between ‘the visible’ and ‘the invisible.’ Here ‘the visible’ refers to the sensible, and ‘the invisible’ not to the insensible, but rather to the visible’s “lining and depth” (1964/1968, p. 149). In a working note Merleau-Ponty explains the chiasm between them:

Meaning is *invisible*, but the invisible is not the contradictory of the visible: the visible itself has an invisible inner framework (*membrure*), and the in-visible is the secret counterpart of the visible, it appears only within it, it is the *Nichturpräsentierbar* [im-pregnable] which is presented to me as such within the world— one cannot see it there and every effort to *see it there* makes it disappear, but it is *in the line* of the visible, it is its virtual focus, it is inscribed within it (in filigree)--- (p. 215)

In this chiasmic bond, two distinct things exist as one, where each one partakes and exchanges with/in the other, intertwining, over and over. This relationship implies reversal, repetition, circularity, equilibrium, and, of course, movement. Phenomenological thought explains perception as pre-reflective (pre-theoretical), thus, attempting ‘to see’ the invisible inevitably makes it disappear because ‘to think to see’ is to move away from the visible.<sup>12</sup> To be clear, “to see” here refers both to perception and knowledge; this is the chiasmic bond between the sensible and the knowable. Seeing is the act of perception, the medium through which we come know or attach signification to what we see. As such, the thought of seeing

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<sup>12</sup> “Once perception is understood as interpretation, sensation, which served as a point of departure, is definitely left behind—every perceptual consciousness being already beyond sensation [...] We hit upon sensation when, while reflecting on our perceptions, we want to express that they are not absolutely our doing [...] Pure sensation belongs to the domain of the constituted, and not to the constituting mind [...] In actual perception, taken in its nascent state and prior to all speech, the sensible sign and its signification are not even ideally separable” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012, pp. 39-40).

comes *after* the act of seeing as perception. Thus perception is not only the physical act of seeing *nor* its signification, but the experiencing action that does not require thought-analysis to have meaning *and* that leads to meaning. Thus “to see” is “to know” because the signification is the sign. Merleau-Ponty explains, “there is no vision without thought: but *it is not enough* to think in order to see. Vision is a conditioned thought; it is borne ‘as occasioned’ by what happens in the body; it is ‘incited’ to think by the body” (1964/2007, p. 365).<sup>13</sup>

Thus, as the chiasm between the sensible and the sentient makes clear, we can only see and know according to—and because of—our bodies.

But there is a paradox in seeing because our bodies inherently limit our vision.

Merleau-Ponty explains:

In the visual field we see just as far as the hold of our gaze upon the things extends—well beyond the zone of clear vision, and even behind ourselves. When we reach the limits of the visual field, we don’t go from vision to non-vision: the phonograph playing in the neighboring room and which I do not explicitly see still counts in my visual field; reciprocally, what we do see is always, in some respect, not seen: there must be hidden sides of things and things ‘behind us’ is there is to be a ‘front’ of things, or things ‘in front of us’ and in short, a perception. The limits of the visual field are a necessary moment of the organization of the world and not an objective contour. (1945/2012, p. 289)

The issue of the visible and the invisible is clear here. Our vision is not limited to what we can physically see; the visible-sensible extends beyond what is present, what is apparent. But there is also absence in presence; the visible carries the invisible within it. Again, the visible

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<sup>13</sup> Because of this consciousness carries a certain ambiguity. “True *cogito* is not the private exchange between thought with the thought I that I am having this thought, for they only unite through the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012, p. 311), or, as he would later explain, knowing the self—knowing the world happen through the “flesh.”

here doesn't refer exclusively to the material, nor does the invisible refer to the immaterial or abstract (like thought); they don't exist in a binary opposition. Thus, for example, "the imaginary is not an absolute inobservable: it finds in the body analogues of itself that incarnate it" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p.77). In fact, the imaginary and the real are both located in the body, as "carnal existence of the idea, as well as by a sublimation of the flesh" (1964/1968, p. 155). The material and abstract, the real and the imaginary, the image and the idea, in the end aren't very useful categories to describe what's going on here. The visible and the invisible are both perceivable and knowable just as they can be unperceivable and unknowable, without regard to our ability "to see" them in a purely physical sense. The visible and the invisible refer instead to an operative mode of being. They are different things that exist as one, existing "in the same line" of vision, where to see is to see according to the invisible—the un-nameable, the un-sayable—filigree inscribed in the world, the thing that makes the world visible as such to us. Thus, it's only through the visible that we are able know the invisible and vice versa.

Philosopher Trevor Perri's (2013) analysis of Merleau-Ponty's study of Cézanne and of the act of painting and aesthetics more broadly helps explain this chiasm in relation to the image and the body. Merleau-Ponty explains that when looking at a Cézanne painting, the objects in the painting are not present in the way we perceive things to be present (i.e., the image is not there in the same way the paint and canvas are), but they are also not absent, there is a depth to them "beyond the zone of clear vision." Moreover, while the painting itself is not perceived as real, it's also not perceived to be not real (the painting isn't some other reality). That is, the painted image isn't simply a non-real representation of absent objects. In Sartrean terms, it's not a 'thing,' but it's also not 'nothing.' To look at a painting is to simultaneously notice presence/absence, reality/non-reality, and visibility/invisibility.



Perri writes that Merleau-Ponty describes this ‘mode of being’ that appears when looking at art as “quasi-presence and imminent visibility” (2013, p. 77). What this means is that when looking at an image such as a painting, “we see this very same world, but we see it in a way that we were not aware of being able to see before. We see the world *according to* what is made visible in the painting” (Perri, 2013, p. 90).<sup>14</sup> In other words, to look at art is to be in chiasmic relation with it, to be ‘touched’ by it, to sense the invisible it reveals.

Furthermore, this chiasmic relation also exists between the artist (his body) and the painting, in the process of making a painting, “It is by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings [...] that body which is an intertwining of vision and movement” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/2007, p. 353). Perri explains, “since the painting has originated in or is the expression of our carnal existence, it is not only the case that only a body can paint; it is also the case that only a body can appreciate what, according to Merleau-Ponty, is rendered visible in the painting” (2013, p. 94). Thus, as an expression of the artist’s (carnal) perception of the world (rather than a representation of the world), the painting shapes how we perceive it by directing our attention to a particular way of perceiving that is at once strange and familiar. In this way, the painting compels us to notice how we notice. Adopting a different way of seeing may even make us use our bodies in a new way—the painting can teach us. By making us *look with* rather than *look at*, art has the potential to expand our own perception and experience of the world.

Merleau-Ponty in fact wrote a great deal on aesthetics and art because he saw its expressive potential. In *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964/1968), he arrives at his sharpest articulation of the chiasm between the visible and invisible—this “bond between the flesh

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<sup>14</sup> “Rather than seeing [the painting], I see according to, or with it” (in Perri [2013], p. 90; from Merleau-Ponty [1964/2007], p. 355).

and the idea, between the visible and the interior armature which it manifests and which it conceals” (p. 149)—through a discussion of Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*.

Literature, music, the passions, but also the experience of the visible world are—no less than is the science of Lavoisier and Ampère—the exploration of an invisible and the disclosure of a universe of ideas. The difference is simply that this invisible, these ideas, unlike those of that science, cannot be detached from the sensible appearances and be erected into a second positivity [...] The musical idea, the literary idea, the dialectic of love [...] have their logic, their coherence, their points of intersection, their concordances, and here also the appearances are the disguise of unknown ‘forces’ and ‘laws.’ But it is as though the secrecy wherein they lie and whence the literary expression draws them were their proper mode of existence. For these truths are not only hidden like a physical reality which we have not been able to discover, invisible in fact but which we will one day be able to see [...] provided that the screen that masks it is lifted. Here, on the contrary, there is no vision without the screen: the ideas we are speaking of would not be better known to us if we had no body and no sensibility; it is then that they would be inaccessible to us. [...] they could not be given to us as ideas except in a carnal experience. It is not only that we would find in that carnal experience the occasion to think them; it is that they owe their authority, their fascinating, indestructible power, precisely to the fact that they are in transparency behind the sensible, or in its heart. Each time we want to get at [the idea] immediately, or lay hands on it, or circumscribe it, or see it unveiled, we do in fact feel that the attempt is misconceived, that it retreats in the measure that we approach. The explication does not give us the idea itself; it is but a second version of it, a more manageable derivative. (1964/1968, p. 149-150)

Creative expression helps reveal the tangled relation between these categories because it does not rely on fixing or ‘explicitation.’ It relies on what we’ve previously discussed as ‘evocation.’ The invisible is perceivable and knowable to the degree that it’s evoked and left open, and remains invisible to the degree one attempts to articulate it and thus close it. Unlike scientism, which separates the visible, apparent, observable into a secondary realm from which the hidden invisible forces of a primary order can be made visible, art doesn’t make such a distinction. Art doesn’t separate meaning from being, from its visible form; its meaning is in its *flesh*. And while this form is also what conceals its meaning, we wouldn’t be able to apprehend meaning without it. *There is no vision without the screen*: the invisible can only be seen through the visible flesh. We can only arrive at meaning because we have a body. The power of meaning thus lies in its ability to remain hidden, because it only becomes visible *through* the “flesh” of our being. Meaning is powerful because it can only be occasionally grasped with our hearts.

What lies at the core of this chiasm between the visible and invisible for Merleau-Ponty therefore are the limits of expression through language. He works to understand experience as it happens before we articulate it through language, in its open, pre-reflective state, and while recognizing the rhetorical doubling that would inevitably take place, he attempts to arrive at this understanding through language. This crisscrossing back and forth between the being and language—itself a chiasm—is a communication that results in indeterminacy. His notion of chiasm thus reflects the indeterminacy and openness that is the nature of being—in language and beyond. Art, he explains, more successfully expresses the experience of the body and the world because it communicates *through* indeterminacy and openness; it’s suggestive rather than prescriptive.

In his writing on space, philosopher Henri Lefebvre borrows from Merleau-Ponty, discussing the visible and invisible as the double illusions of ‘transparency’ and ‘opacity’ that conceal the production of social space. Under the illusion of transparency, Lefebvre explains, space appears as open and intelligible and can thus claim innocence, “anything hidden or dissimulated—and hence dangerous—is antagonistic to transparency, under whose reign everything can be taken in by a single glance from that mental eye which illuminates whatever it contemplates” (1974/1991, p. 28). Under the illusion of opacity, space appears as materially substantial and natural; it’s a “realistic illusion.” Here transparency is related to idealism, whereas opacity is tied to materialism (of both the natural and mechanic kind). For Lefebvre these two realms don’t exist in an antagonistic relationship, but rather “...each illusion embodies and nourishes the other. Shifting back and forth between the two, and the flickering or oscillatory effect that it produces, are thus just as important as either of the illusions considered in isolation” (1974/1991, p. 30). Lefebvre also believed the work of artists and poets had the potential to produce glitches in the communication between these two opposite ‘illusions.’

In the case of the border, the visible and the invisible, along with materialism and idealism, are perceived to be in an opposition. As I will detail later, a major debate in border studies deals with the failings of using the border as a metaphor. The border, social scientists argue, is a real place where people live; to talk about borders metaphorically is to deny this reality. This argument has in part been a response to what has been dubbed a postmodern ‘fetishization of borders’, or their conceptual elevation as powerful sites due to the potential crossings and disruptions that take place there. Because these boundary disturbances contest order, border sites are thus understood to more successfully counter hegemonic forces or structures. More recent scholarship has shifted towards ‘border materiality’, an emphasis on

the border as a state apparatus of surveillance and selective exclusion and inclusion, reflecting a backlash against postmodern and poststructuralist thought more focused on border porosity, fluidity, and nomadism. Together with this emphasis on ‘matter,’ surveillance border regimes fuel iconophobic traditions and distrust of not just the image, but of the imaginary. Indeed, the reality of Debord’s “spectacle” has surpassed his fatalist imagination. In the context of a “hyperreality,” we are hard-pressed to hold on to the things we can touch and therefore with some certainty call “real.”

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A more in-depth analysis of the ways consumption, desire, and value beyond capitalist production happen at the border is needed, but for now I will briefly say that part of what I propose here *is* a fetishization of the border. Let me explain. The study of the fetish object is often approached from a materialist perspective that examines how objects change as they become associated with excessive and undue value or desire (such as Marx’s ‘commodity’ or Debord’s ‘image’). Here a fetish is understood to be a thing one makes or does (a fetish is produced), only then the thing begins to hold power over those who produced it, or they begin treating the thing like a deity. As such, the fetish (and the image as fetish, according to Mitchell) is an illusion. Under this rubric, ‘fetishizing the border’ results in a deceptive distancing away from the material—an ‘alienation’ from the processes that produced the border. We fall into conceptual and material idolatry—in other words, ideology—and a conflation of value with the border object, respectively.

Postcolonial theorists have discussed this fetish dynamic as “colonial desire” of the “Other.” The border as unknown frontier full of possibility fuels desires of conquest and exploration. Even intellectual desires of absolute and complete knowledge fall under this. At the same time, this imagination (and desire is always linked with the imagination) is also

imbued with fear of the unknown. The border as peripheral is thus also associated with the marginal and the barbaric, elements the border was put in place to keep out, away from the “pure” core or center. In this way, the border functions as a mirroring device. In the particular case of Tijuana, for example, the rise of the city’s “Black Legend” served as necessary opposite to white American sensibilities during the U.S. Prohibition. But, as many have said before, these distinctions and the relationship between self/other aren’t clear-cut, the view changes depending on where we position ourselves. And this isn’t only a matter of what side of the border we are on when we look at it—whether we look north to south or south to north (or east to west, etc.). But, more broadly, it also has to do with our “ways of seeing” the border, e.g., if we approach it from a macro or micro perspective, if the theories or structures we use are totalizing, fixed, stable, or believed to hold special powers that will render things fully legible or even knowable.

William Pietz’ (1985, 1987) work on the origin of the fetish actually accounts for its dynamism. According to him, the notion of fetish only came about through the colonial confrontation between African and European traditions. The fetish came about in the realm of (power-laden) social exchange and contract, the medium of trust between both groups that ensured trade. Often times, these fetishes were improvised on the spot. Following this, anthropologist David Graeber (2007) argues the fetish is not illusory but rather an object “in the process of construction” and as such, fetishism is best understood as a kind of “social creativity.” “Fetishism,” he argues is the point “where objects we have created or appropriated for our own purposes suddenly come to be seen as powers imposed on us, precisely at the moment when they come to embody some newly created social bond” (p. 138-139). This view of the fetish understands the world as unfixed and impermanent, as intertwining the spiritual and material realms, as always in the process of being created and

improvised through new social arrangements, a view Graeber argues is more in line with the perspective of African merchants at the time (p. 146). In this iteration, the fetish *manifests* social relations rather than obscures them as Marx and European merchants did with their emphasis on materiality and iconoclasm.

The fetish as a site of improvisation, production, transformation, and intertwining-chiasmic social relation presents a model for conceptualizing both the image and the border. Fetishism is a kind of bordering and imaging and vice versa. And just like the image, the border is a kind of fetish—the border has special powers. To truly fetishize the border is thus to leave it open by emphasizing creativity and action, not to close it by reducing it to an object (materialism) or a metaphor (idealism) or a set of binaries (inclusion/exclusion) or to anything for that matter. That is to say, the power of the fetish, the image, and the border lies in their *in-betweenness*—a liminality that generates and is predicated on movement, and is thus unstable, unfixable and ultimately unknowable. It's only when we refuse to accept the border's nature that we run into conceptual problems.

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While this materialist reaction is likely necessary and not inherently misguided, the danger in exalting the material as real and therefore critical is that it offers up its supposed opposite—the idea, the imaginary, the intangible, the unquantifiable, the untabulatable—as unnecessary, excessive, even wasteful...as the thing we need to cut out and throw away. This is further complicated when we attempt to distinguish between what's real and what's not, for “if the myth, the dream, and the illusion are to be possible, then the apparent and the real must remain ambiguous” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012, p. 308). Even the social production of space hides behind the illusion that space is transparent and “natural”, “the rational is thus naturalized, while nature cloaks itself in nostalgias which supplant rationality” (Lefebvre,

1974/1991, p. 30). In the case of the border, philosopher Thomas Nail (2016) notes that to understand it “we should start with the border and not with societies or states, which presuppose its existence. The border has become the social condition necessary for the emergence of certain dominant social formations, not the other way around” (p. 4).

Given all of this, in what ways has the border been rendered natural or transparent? What visions make the border visible or invisible? If the problem with metaphor is that in moving away from the material it renders the place of the border meaningless, then isn't understanding the border exclusively in its geopolitical sense just another way of reducing its meaning to another abstraction, namely, that of the state (through a kind of synecdoche, no less)? Is this materialist backlash then not also in line with a higher education discourse that proclaims the arts and the humanities study the imaginary while the sciences study the real, in order to discredit and defund the former and extol and fund the latter?

All of this to say, the problem with a strict materialist approach (or an idealist approach, for that matter) is that we run into the same ancient debates around ‘image’ and ‘idea,’ or ‘real’ and ‘imaginary.’ And as we have seen with this extended discussion about the visible and invisible, to borrow performance studies scholar Richard Schechner's (1985) phrase—the imaginary is “not real,” but it's also “not not real.” The real and the imaginary, the image and the idea, the visible and the invisible, are *not* the same thing, but they're also *not not* the same thing. Thus, they do not exist in opposition, but in strange relation. They exist in-between one another; in chiasmic terms, as a liminal reversible whole. Rather than thinking about the border either materially or ideally, isn't it then more productive to approach it as it is—a thing that encompasses both categories at once, that exists in-between



and beyond them? “The world is made of the very stuff of the body,”<sup>15</sup> Merleau-Ponty said, the co-constitutive movement between the two means “that vision is caught or is made in the middle of things, where something visible undertakes to see” (1964/2007, p. 354).

MacDougall explains how film is also caught in-between, as it “both signifies and yet refuses signification. It asserts itself as *figuration*, but to the extent that it implicates filmmaker and viewer, it transcends it” (1998, p.83). The border as a liminal space will forever sit in-between. My hope is that by adopting a creative liminal vision, we might be able to better see the visible and invisible of everyday experience in this in-between place. My proposal to rethink the notion of border through film is thus an attempt to change our habits of perception, our “ways of seeing” the border.

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In this dissertation, I rethink the idea of border by exploring how mobility, temporality and performance happen in the space of *la Linea*. I examine the contrasting movements, temporal rhythms, and performances of two groups: 1) vendors, whose free movements around the border emphasize spatial preoccupations, and 2) border crossers, whose limited mobility highlights the importance of time. For border crossers, the checkpoint represents a liminal space of waiting as they stand in long lines to cross the border. For vendors, the site is a destination where many have worked for generations. While crossers are mobile in the sense of their daily movement across borders, they remain relatively immobile in this site as they wait in line. Vendors do not generally cross the border and are perceived to be permanent fixtures, yet they are hyper mobile when compared to crossers in the context of this space, spending much of their time walking around.

Examining border crossers’ and vendors’ contrasting experiences of movement and time in

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<sup>15</sup> An observation that is true in a cosmic and biological sense as well as carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, and nitrogen make up most things on Earth.

the space of the geopolitical *Línea* reveals important information on the nature of borders, and prompts us to question our understanding of the relationship between privilege and mobility.

Performance at the border takes place on different planes, scales, and in different ways. *La Línea* can be understood as a theatrical space for spectacle, everyday ritual, and various other performances. The large mass of people engaged in daily commuting represent a spectacular display in itself. The site is visually imposing—which is related to its iconic status—and provides a large captive audience of viewers, something that has led to the site's use as a performance stage by local artists. Moreover, the line between performer and audience here is blurred as vendors, crossers, and CBP agents simultaneously perform for, observe, and surveil one another. Like movement and time, these different types and elements of performance become 'mixed up' in this site creating various lines beyond the geopolitical border.

Approaching the study of the *Línea* phenomenologically has meant rethinking the notion of border. As I will elaborate in the following section, I propose the concept of *revolver* (to mix, to stir) to think through the shifting dynamics of mobility, temporality, and performance taking place between these lines.

### **Fields of Study**

Like other studies of borders (and the field of border studies itself), this work is interdisciplinary in nature not by choice, but by necessity. Borders catalogue, differentiate, and divide. They are what separate disciplines and areas of study from one another. To study borders—those in-between spaces—means approaching them from the various fields they themselves divide. One disciplinary perspective is simply not enough. As an interdisciplinary project about borders—that is, an in-between project about the in-between—it might appear

to be spread too wide too thinly (a common critique leveled against interdisciplinarity). Indeed, if rigidly approached from any field, this dissertation is sure to provide plenty of ammunition for such an argument. There are many gaps, digressions, conscious and unconscious omissions; every observation could be analyzed from multiple perspectives beyond the ones I chose; there are likely more questions than explanations to be found here, etc. “All errors are my own” as they say, and every error an invitation. My interdisciplinary approach is, I hope, craftfully (artfully?) untidy, not out of laziness (a lack of “discipline”) or as a way to disguise ignorance, but because there’s no other way for me to think deeply about home.<sup>16</sup> Borders, like most things in life, don’t operate on narrow disciplinary terms and need to be approached broadly if we’re to appreciate something profound about them.

Broadly speaking, then, this project brings together humanistic and social scientific perspectives,<sup>17</sup> inadvertently reflecting concerns raised in two foundational works in the field of border studies: Gloria Anzaldúa’s literary work *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) and Renato Rosaldo’s anthropological study, *Culture and Truth* (1989). I will discuss these works in more detail in the upcoming sections, but I bring them up here to remind us the subject of borders has been approached from multiple perspectives since the beginning. There has been much debate in the field between literary and cultural studies scholars and anthropologists about the use of the border ‘as metaphor’—a distinction between the concrete realities of the U.S.-Mexico border versus its more figurative dimensions. While this has been a generative debate, it also reflects a broader anxiety around the slippage of the literary and the poetic into the realm of social theory. This is a view that puts the concrete/material/visible at odds

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<sup>16</sup> I use “craft” here as C. Wright Mills did in his essay “On Intellectual Craftsmanship” (1959). For the social scientist, he explained, work and life are not separate, which means “you must learn to use your life experience in your intellectual work: continually to examine and interpret it. In this sense craftsmanship is the center of yourself and you are personally involved in every intellectual product upon which you may work” (p. 196).

<sup>17</sup> Many have already argued this is precisely where anthropology is located, in-between the humanities and the social sciences.

with the abstract/intangible/opaque, and presumes the latter as less critical or serious.<sup>18</sup> This dissertation rejects this perspective and instead looks at the ways these two areas inform one another and are integral to a robust understanding of borders.

Contemporary border writer Cristina Rivera Garza (2004) writes about the process and limits of writing, about the border, and about the borders within literary genres in her blog “No hay tal lugar: U-tópicos contemporáneos” (There’s no such place: Contemporary U-topics). In an entry entitled “*escrituras colindantes*,” or adjoining/bordering writings, she writes:

*En la vida como en la escritura, lo verdaderamente interesante ocurre en las colindancias— esos espacios volubles donde lo que es no acaba de ser y, lo que no es, todavía no empieza. Lejos de tratarse de espacios armónicos donde lo distinto se intercambia, creando la posibilidad de una síntesis, estas colindancias son espacios de choque [...] Me interesa, en todo caso, la conmoción del encuentro, la tensión que lo genera y que lo sostiene, más que la resolución, siempre ficticia, con la cual se trata de disminuir el peso de lo diferente, lo disarmonico e, incluso, lo incompatible. En tanto concepto, luego entonces, la colindancia no es semejante a la hibridación. La colindancia no es una combinatoria. No es una nueva forma de fijación. No salva.*

[...]

*Dice Deleuze: Hay que escribir de una forma líquida o gaseosa, precisamente porque la percepción normal y la opinión ordinaria son sólidas, geométricas.*

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<sup>18</sup> The same can be said about distinctions made between creative expression/art and scholarship. This is again an issue of borders: disciplinary boundaries, the legitimacy of particular forms and conventions (and the illegitimacy of others), as well as academia’s general distrust of aesthetics as they pertain to scholarly form. This is not only a question about classification and form (what counts as scholarship), but about epistemology (what counts as knowledge). Which in turn raises another important question about who the gatekeepers of ‘what counts’ are or what kinds of normalized ideologies and beliefs inform such gatekeeping. Put differently, what kinds of knowledge, perspectives, and people are excluded when conventions around scholarly form, research topics, methods, theory, etc., remain unchallenged and taken for granted?

*Una osamenta pluvial. Una estructura arenosa. Una osteoporosis. Una enfermedad. Una fuga permanente. Una manera de no estar.*

(In life like in writing, what's truly interesting happens along *colindancias* [adjoinings]—those unstable spaces where what is, isn't yet, and what isn't, hasn't begun. Far from being harmonious spaces where difference is exchanged, creating possibilities for synthesis, these *colindancias* are spaces of clashes [...] What interests me, in any case, is the disturbance of the encounter, the tension that generates and sustains it, more than the resolution, always a fiction that attempts to diminish the weight of what is different, disharmonious, and even incompatible. Conceptually, then, the *colindancia* is not like hybridity. The *colindancia* doesn't combine. It's not a new way of fixing. It doesn't save.

[...]

Deleuze says: Lets write in liquid or gas form, precisely because normal perception and ordinary opinion are solid, geometric.

A rainy skeleton. A sandy structure. An osteoporosis. A disease. A permanent escape. A way to not be.)

I follow Rivera Garza's call for *escrituras colindantes*, not in the writing of this dissertation text per se, but in my approach to the study of *la Línea*. For her, life and writing are two different modes of being that flow into each other—just as there is a border life, there is a border writing, too. Not writing from the border, but rather writing that *is* bordered. That is, beyond a place, the border is also a verb—it's something that *happens*. Like other scholars, Rivera Garza presents a disharmonious view of the border, counter to the harmony assumed and made widespread by Nestor Garcia Canclini's (1989) famous notion of hybridity, among others. Rivera Garza's border is an unstable place-verb that leaves no

resolution and does not “save” from insecurity and chaos by fixing meaning. It’s an anti-geometric and therefore anti-linear stance to borders, one that embraces uncertainty by emphasizing the ephemeral and the aberrant. As we will see, this perspective on the border echoes the issues taken up by phenomenological anthropologists and describes the nature of borders themselves.

The border exists simultaneously as a notion, as an image, as a place. It holds multiple and often contradictory meanings. As we saw in the initial conversation with local musician Damian Fry, the context of Tijuana shows us that the idea of the border exists simultaneously as a physical place with distinct values—*la Linea* is a specific locale that holds meaning independent from but also related to the general conception of *frontera*. How can we study the border as a place and as a concept simultaneously, without collapsing one understanding onto the other? I propose that approaching the border as action—that is, examining how the border does and acts—helps us understand the border more deeply. Thus, the notions of mobility, temporality, and performance are approached through the specific actions they manifest in this space—**walking, waiting, and performing**.

The attempt here too is for the study’s approach (theoretically and methodologically) to reflect the object of study itself, in my iteration of the classic relationship between form and content.<sup>19</sup> For me that has meant wrestling with binaries like abstract/concrete, particular/general, visible/invisible, self/other, so often discussed and challenged in anthropology and border studies. As an anthropological study about and from a border that is interested in the particularities of place and how people live (in) it, this work draws heavily from geography and social theory on space and place. I therefore locate this interdisciplinary work at the intersection of anthropology, human geography, and border studies.

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<sup>19</sup> C. Wright Mills (1959) again: “Let every man be his own methodologist; let every man be his own theorist; let theory and method again become part of the practice of a craft” (p. 224).

## Anthropology

As mentioned earlier, this work engages phenomenological and sensorial approaches in anthropology that are concerned with questions of selfhood and (inter) subjectivity, sensory and embodied experience as a constitutive of and constituting knowledge, the ambiguities and indeterminate nature of the everyday, as well as how the ways we observe or perceive shape our understanding of the world and our consciousness (Castaing-Taylor & Paravel, 2012; Csordas, 1990, 1994; Desjarlais, 1997; Desjarlais & Throop, 2011; Feld & Basso, 1996; Geurts, 2003; Grimshaw, 2014; Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2009; Ingold 2000, 2004, 2011; Ingold & Verngunst, 2008; Jackson 1996, 1998, 2012; MacDougall, 2007; MacDougall & MacDougall, 1982; Rouch, 1955, 1958, 1967; Sniadecki & Cohn, 2011; Stoller 1997, 2002; Throop, 2010). Of special interest are the ways our experience with and perception of the world is always *emplaced*, that is, embodied experience has to do with the body in space. Just as we interact with other people or entities we also interact with places in particular ways. Critical to this understanding is the notion of a ‘lifeworld’ and the intersubjective encounters or ‘meshwork’ (Ingold, 2011) that happen there through our embodied and emplaced experiences.

According to phenomenologists, we live in a dynamic and changing world made up of intersubjective relationships. Specifically, this world is a *lifeworld* (Edmund Husserl’s term), “the unquestioned, practical, historically conditioned, pretheoretical, and familiar world of our everyday lives” (Desjarlais & Throop, 2011, p. 91). In his elaboration of an existential anthropology, Michael Jackson defines lifeworld as “...the *social* space where thought arises, occurs, and transpires,” preferring this term to ‘culture’ or ‘society’ for evoking a sense of generative forces in a complex field (2012, p. 255). The lifeworld is a pre-reflexive, or again, pre-theoretical stance, that may become reflexive through intersubjective encounters. This

perspective allows for a more fluid understanding of differences between subjective and objective reality (and more broadly, between what constitutes a subject or an object) because “[distinctions] between what is of the mind and of the world, are shaped by the attitude that a social actor takes up toward the world, as well as by the historical and cultural conditions that inform the values, assumptions, ideals, and norms embedded within it” (Desjarlais & Throop, 2011, p. 89).

The dynamism and pliability of ‘lifeworld’ fits well with notions of border spaces as generative, complex, and ever changing. In the context of the *Linea* lifeworld, a key force is the movement and lack thereof of vendors and crossers. These mobilities result in diverse intersubjective encounters that shape people’s sense of self. Distinct mobilities also represent particular embodied engagements in the space-time of the *Linea*, which are shaped by the sociopolitical and economic conditions of the geopolitical border. Some examples: you wait in line longer if you don’t have new documentation or if it’s the holiday season. Labor unions and social networks among vendors designate particular areas of the checkpoint to vendors. Vendors’ locations determine the kinds and amounts of sales, and are tied to social status. For border crossers, immobility and waiting result in a heavy emphasis on time and constant existential reflection. The site’s performative dimensions become prominent and mixed up precisely because of the intersubjective encounters that take place in this particular space.

Intersubjectivity (also Husserl’s term) here follows Heidegger’s *dasein* (being-in-the-world) and Hannah Arendt’s “the subjective in-between,” explaining human existence as relational. Intersubjectivity “capture[s] the sense in which, we, as individual subjects, live intentionally or in tension with others as well as with a world that comprises techniques, traditions, ideas, and nonhuman things” (Jackson, 2012, p. 5). A person then is tied up with



herself and with others, living *intentionally* with them. People, things, and ideas, therefore, are not and do not have a stable essence or identity because they are always being shaped and reshaped by intersubjective encounters.

While Jackson's existential concerns in *Lifeworlds* (2012) are more people-centered, Tim Ingold's emphasis on ecology and place present a useful avenue to expand on intersubjectivity in the context of the border. Ingold (2000) argues against the term 'intersubjectivity,' a term he says refers to a more conventional psychological and anthropological understanding of relationships between subjects (i.e. people), which reifies the dualisms between subject/object and between the social-cultural and the natural-biological. He proposes instead "interagentivity" (p. 47) to describe the quality that eliminates these distinctions in hunter-gatherer societies. The point here is that the phenomenological "intersubjectivity" is more of a "meshwork," or "entangled lines of life, growth and movement" (Ingold, 2011, p.63). Ingold believes "the organism (animal or human) should be understood not as a bounded entity surrounded by an environment but as an unbounded entanglement of lines in fluid space" (2011, p. 64). This proposition is significant because activates the environment. People are not only involved in intersubjective encounters in static space, but rather, people are also always engaged with/by their environments. Place becomes a kind of subject. The 'unbounded' quality of the organism and environment eliminates the assumed distinction between 'nature as object' and 'society as subject'. A meshwork then is predicated on 'agentive' movement of organism *and* environment, the 'paths' we make and the lines that cross us.

Ingold's emphasis on the active role of space/place/environment reflects a general attention paid to action and doing. His earlier "dwelling perspective" presents an active *doing* through the world, such that culture is made, not given. He explains, "The growth and

development of a person, in short, is to be understood relationally as a *movement along a way of life*, conceived not as the enactment of a corpus of rules and principles (or a ‘culture’) received from predecessors, but as the negotiation of a path through the world” (Ingold, 2000, p. 146). This movement and negotiation is done through “skilled practice,” or “the capabilities of action and perception of the whole organic being (indissolubly mind and body) situated in a richly structured environment” (Ingold, 2000, p. 5). This skilled practice is thus ‘embodied,’ dependent on our bodily awareness and experience of our environment.

The notion of embodiment can thus be understood by focusing on how the body ‘does’ or practices in space. For Paul Stoller (1997), the body is not a text that can be read or analyzed, but rather a way of opening up to the world and to others (and their worlds) through the senses or “embodied hospitality.” “To accept sensuousness,” Stoller says, “[is] to lend one’s body to the world and accept its complexities, tastes, structures, and smells” (1997, p. xvii). The body also has the ability to incorporate cultural memory and history, so cultural memory can be embodied (1997, p. 47). Stoller’s emphasis on both the body of the ethnographer in the field, with the inherent physical demands of “a fuller sensual awareness of the smells, tastes, sounds, and textures of life among the others” reflects his desire to restore the sensuous body as an important site of knowledge production in the social sciences (1997, p. 23). Thomas Csordas (1990) also presents the body as a starting point for analyzing culture and people, but he explicitly collapses the distinction between the body as object and subject. Csordas explains, “This approach to embodiment begins from the methodological postulate that the body is not an *object* to be studied in relation to culture, but is to be considered as the *subject* of culture, or in other words as the existential ground of culture” (p. 5). The body here is the locus by and through which we engage the world and produce culture. Both cases reject the body as object, repository of cultural symbols and

meanings, and rather present the body as an active producer and interpreter. In both accounts however there's also a sense that the self is somewhat bounded in relation to the environment. The body-self exchanges with and is influenced by, but is not necessarily made up by the world.

Edward Casey makes the case for this essential link between embodiment and space/place, arguing “place is the most fundamental form of embodied experience—the site of a powerful fusion of self, space, and time.” (1996, p. 9). Casey follows Merleau-Ponty in proposing the body and place as interwoven because we perceive places by being in them. Our perception is simultaneously *constituted*, “by cultural and social structures seeded in deepest level of perception,” (1996, p. 18) and *constitutive*, “our immersion in [places] is not subjection to them, since we may modify their influence even as we submit to it.” Perception (in both its sensuous, ‘prereflexive’ form and when there’s meaning) then, is always as embodied as it is emplaced. For Casey, “we are not only *in* places but *of* them” (1996, p. 19).

Under this conceptual framework, the embodied self is *constituted* by and *constitutive* of the border and vice versa. All of those bodies and movement (walking), or lack of movement (waiting), make up the border checkpoint. We are the border; the border is us. As the case studies and examples I will draw on throughout will show, this elucidates the high degree of identification many *tijuanenses* have with the border and its importance in the local imaginary. I propose that the more repetitive and mechanical the movements are in the space, the stronger the identification, in some instances giving rise to a border-self, as is the case with some border crossers.

As a site of continuous renewal and change, the San Ysidro checkpoint could be understood as a “non-place”—a non-relational, non-historical, non-identity based place similar to other heavily transited zones such as airports or highways (Auge, 1992/2009).

Alternatively, it could be viewed exclusively as an instrument of state control. Yet closely examining the ways vendors and crossers inhabit the checkpoint reveals how their respective locations and uses of the space create deep place-based ties that shape border meaning. The case of the *Linea* demonstrates that spaces predicated on extreme mobility hold and make meaning through everyday human acts that evoke stability through repetition, such as walking or waiting in line. By focusing on action, on movement, we can thus better understand the border and its people and the relationship between them.

### **Human Geography**

In human geography (also known as cultural geography), the socio-physical environment is the frame through which sociocultural, political, economic, and other processes are examined. Place is an essential unit of analysis that is not taken for granted.<sup>20</sup> This conceptual frame helps us understand how particular spaces (including whole cities) both shape and are shaped by individuals and social processes. In other words, geography can examine the ways we are simultaneously constituted by and are constitutive of spaces. Anthropology and border studies have an implicit emphasis on place. Anthropologists understand that people inhabit places and that the particularities of context are essential to any deep understanding of a place, of its people and culture. Within border studies, anthropologists remain very interested in conducting research in border locales. Inherent to anthropology of the border is the study of the place of the border and the border as a place. The field of border studies maintains an awkward relationship to place as there's a broader anxiety around 'placing' the border. Where do we locate the border at a moment when border processes such as state security practices extend beyond the physical locations of

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<sup>20</sup> In this text I use "space" and "place" interchangeably. Space is often understood to be general and all encompassing while places are thought to be concrete and unique. The idea is that 'spaces' become 'places' after they become invested with meaning. I agree with other propositions that make no such distinction, emphasizing instead the ways space/place is practiced and processual.

borders? More existentially—*where* is the border? Which is really another way of asking, *what is it?*<sup>21</sup> My aim is to make explicit the implicit relationship to place. That is not to say that anthropologists and other border scholars have not discussed the importance of place—“place” (that is, “the border”) is the object of study, after all. However, the existential anxieties within border studies demonstrate the border as an object of study is not clear-cut and at times not understood as a “place” at all. The manner in which we approach place is therefore extremely important. Geography foregrounds and offers a nuanced perspective on place, presenting an opportunity to deepen our understanding of the border.

This project thus begins with the assumption that human experience is always enplaced, making space a crucial analytical category for investigating how people make meaning *of, with, and through* their environments. Space is a product of and is constituted through interrelations, and is therefore always under construction (Massey, 2005). Simply put, space is not the container where life happens; rather, space is a set of relations and a way of understanding the world. Just as people make places, places themselves are agents that “gather” meaning as they are physically constructed, demolished, repurposed, and lived in (Escobar, 2001; Feld & Basso, 1996; Casey, 1996). While these meanings of place change over time, traces remain, lending them palimpsest qualities. Heavily trafficked and conflicted sites like *la Linea* therefore have innumerable and contradictory layers of signification, and are especially suited for examining the relationship between space and people, and larger social processes.

Within the field of human geography, this project uses the notion of the social production of space put forward by Lefebvre (1974/1991), and extended by Massey (1994, 2005) and Harvey (1989, 2005, 2006), as well as phenomenological perspectives on space

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<sup>21</sup> I will discuss all of these issues in detail in the following section.

and the environment (Casey, 1996; Seamon, 1979; Tuan, 1974, 1977/2001). The social production of space presents a way of examining the relationship between the border space and the contemporary global capitalist economy. In particular, it offers a way of thinking through the ways global forces and the state shape mobility and temporality at the checkpoint, thus exploring how power is manifest spatially in this site. The phenomenological perspective on geography offers a space-centered approach to examining border dwellers' everyday practices and experiences, which transform the functions and meanings global and state forces impose on the site.

The social production of space refers to the interrelation of three understandings of spatialized meaning-making (Lefebvre 1974/1991). The first is “conceived space”, the confluence of socioeconomic, political, and ideological factors involved in creating a physical space, through urban planning or state policy, for example. The second is “perceived space” and involves the everyday experience and use of space, such as how people move through spaces. The third is “lived space,” a space made through creative and imaginative expressions that challenge the imposition of “conceived space,” by rethinking everyday uses of and views on space. Whereas “perceived space” is unconscious or automatic, “lived space” is conscious and intentional, involving reflection on the other two areas. This final “thirdspace” (Soja, 1996) is a generative space that brings material and imagined spatial realms together, opening up the hegemonic discourses of conceived space for critique<sup>22-23</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Conceived this way, there is an inherent liminality to space itself, as we exist in all of these categories simultaneously even when one area is emphasized more than others. The slippages between “conceived” and “perceived” space are what “lived” or “thirdspace” attempt to capture. But really, the slippages are everywhere, within and outside of these categories if we think about space as made up by a multiplicity of relations and movements.

<sup>23</sup> From this framework, Edward Soja develops a “trialectic of being” in space, with space 1) as material reality (objective), space 2) as imagined (representations, subjective), and “thirdspace” being the coming together of real and imagined, of concrete and abstract elements. This is a postmodern take on space because it interrupts the binary between real/imagined. Lefebvre and Soja’s intervention is that the thirdspace is a new way of thinking because it is a lived and practiced space, both a combination and more than material and imagined

Under this framework, creative works are understood as more than representations or products of social circumstance; the creative process itself is an important space for reworking and constructing social reality. As I will later elaborate, my use of filmmaking as an ethnographic method is in part informed by this understanding of “lived” or “thirdspace.” Filmmaking is a collaborative and creative process and experience that opens up our understanding of both the space of the border and border spaces.

Lefebvre argues space is usually understood to be neutral, fixed, objective, and empty, a Euclidian ‘absolute space’ conceptualized “as a field, container, a co-ordinate system of discrete and mutually exclusive locations” (Smith & Katz, 1993, p. 75). This two-dimensional conceptualization of space is what anthropologists Gupta and Ferguson (1992) argued against when they said people and cultures can’t be identified as “spots on the map” (p. 10) and that the long standing “presumption that spaces are autonomous has enabled the power of topography to conceal successfully the topography of power” (p. 8).<sup>24</sup> Thinking about space in this manner is instrumental to systems of domination such as capitalism or colonialism because it hides the social relations of space—the ways space itself is produced—an occlusion Lefebvre dubs the “fetishization of space.” He posits space should not be conceived as a thing (nor as a subject), but rather as a set of relations. Examining these relations and various ways space is produced then presents an opportunity to challenge the ‘topography of power.’

Doreen Massey (1994, 2005) takes up this view in her analysis of global space. For

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spaces (de Certeau also emphasizes the importance of practice). In this way, Soja’s trialectic also borrows from Bhabha’s “third space,” which, like hybridity, comes about from a series of slippages, providing a generative space of representation.

<sup>24</sup> Gupta and Ferguson (1992) decisively brought the problem of place to anthropology. They challenged the isomorphism between culture, space, and place, and “the fiction of cultures as discrete, object-like phenomena occupying discrete spaces” (p. 7), insisting we think of cultural difference and transformation as made through and manifested in the interconnectivity of spaces, “for if one begins with the premise that spaces have *always* been hierarchically interconnected, instead of naturally disconnected, then cultural and social change becomes not a matter of cultural contact but one of rethinking difference *through* connection” (p. 8).

Massey, spaces are not bounded entities with essential, unique, and fixed identities; rather spaces are moments or loci of relation. They are interconnected and hold multiple identities because outside and inside, local and global are always mutually constituted. This doesn't mean that every place is the same (i.e. globalization will produce a homogenized culture). Places are unique and specific not a result of "some long, internalized history" (1994, p. 155), rather they're specific in the particular ways local and broader social relations configure themselves in a specific locale. Space here is not static, closed, or reactive to the global. 'A global sense of place' involves:

Instead [...] of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, or a region, or even a continent. (1994, p. 154)

In *For Space* (2005), Massey elaborates on her notion of space, making the case that space is: 1) produced through interrelations and made up of interactions, 2) "a simultaneity of multiple trajectories"--making space and multiplicity co-constitutive, and finally, 3) as continually under construction and thus, open-ended.<sup>25</sup> She goes on to argue the qualities of space put forth by conceptions of globalization, though discursively 'spatial,' actually serve to suppress and 'tame' space.

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<sup>25</sup> Note how this conceptualization of space resembles phenomenologist notions of 'lifeworld' and 'meshwork' in their shared emphasis on interrelations (intersubjective encounters), multiplicity of movement (which, when discussed in reference to people is tied to everyday practice and action), and the open-ended and ambiguous nature of experience.



Massey critiques several aspects of this “geographical imagination” of global space to explain the implications of this kind of thinking. The first problem is rooted in an inheritance from modernity of “spatial difference convened into temporal sequence” (2005, p. 68). The project of modernity established a way of thinking about space—namely, the isomorphism between space and place and culture Gupta and Ferguson point to—that “underpinned the material enforcement of certain ways of organizing space and the relationship between society and place” (Massey, 2005, p. 65), which continues to inform the way we understand space in globalized times. The idea of places as bounded, authentic, or pre-Western rather than as having always existed interrelationally, is not only erroneous, as many would agree, but reflects a colonizing narrative that views space as a two-dimensional surface to be conquered. The perception of globalization as having qualities of fragmentation, disjunction, and discontinuity, of somehow breaking apart, reflects these assumptions. Moreover, the notion of bounded places supports an understanding of the differences between them as the result of their position along different stages on a single, predetermined, temporal linear progression. Western Europe and Latin America under this framework, for example, are the same, just at a different point along the path of ‘development’. A bounded sense of place therefore also limits our conception of time (and vice versa). This kind of space is closed and predetermined; it doesn’t arise from interaction, nor does it produce a multiplicity of trajectories.

The second overarching problem for Massey is viewing space as instantaneous and therefore depthless. A vision of a completely integrated, interconnected globalized world collapses space, making it a-temporal. Everything happening at the same time everywhere leaves out history, making space depthless. This view also denies space complexity and its ability to remake itself.

Finally, an imagination of the global as an ‘out there,’ “total unfettered mobility, free unbounded space” (2005, p. 81) abstracts space to such degree as to ignore the way it is spatialized materially, on the ground. It’s the opposite vision of modernity—space is open and without barriers rather than bounded and divided—but both “are imaginative geographies which *legitimize* their own production” (2005, p. 87) and uphold a universality systematically denied. A notable example of this way of thinking is the call for simultaneously open and closed borders—the right for ‘free trade’ and right to ‘one’s own place.’<sup>26</sup> The other problem with an un-located, ‘out there’ global space is that it presents a unidirectional hierarchy. The global is understood to produce the local, but not the other way around. A relational perspective of space understands places as “criss-crossings in the wider power-geometries that constitute both themselves and the global” (2005, p. 101), accounting for both the ways the local produces the global and the diverse relationships different locales have to the global. What is at stake here, again, are the “geometries of power, the shifting geographies of power-relations” because “global space, as space more generally, is a product of material practices of power” (2005, p. 85).

David Harvey (1989) proposes globalization has transformed space by producing “time-space compression”. This concept is part of a larger argument where he contends that the rise of postmodern cultural phenomena (the shift from modernism to postmodernism) is rooted in the transformation of late-20<sup>th</sup> century capitalism, i.e., the shift from the regime of Fordism to flexible accumulation. The new capitalism is characterized by shorter and accelerated turn over time between production, exchange and consumption. This brevity is manifested culturally in “...the emphasis upon ephemerality, collage, fragmentation, and

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<sup>26</sup> Gupta and Ferguson (1992) point to this paradox as the irony between localities becoming more blurred while ideas of ethnic distinction and sovereignty become more pervasive. The latter being a position adopted by both leftist and right wing groups. Massey (1994) discussed this phenomenon as a representation of space as ‘reactive’ to the global.

dispersal in philosophical and social thought [that] mimics the conditions of flexible accumulation” (1989, p. 302). Here, Fordism is linked to the relative stability of modernism, and flexible accumulation to the instability of postmodernism, which celebrates difference and ephemerality. Together with flexible accumulation, communication and transport technologies have contributed to changing our perception of space and time, and thus to the development of postmodern cultural forms. The objective qualities of space and time have changed, leading to “time-space compression.” Compression refers to the “speed-up in the pace of life, while so overcoming spatial barriers that the world seems to collapse inwards upon us” (1989, p. 240). Transportation and communication technologies have shortened or destroyed the effects of distance between locations across in the world, evoking a sense of ‘shrinking,’ ephemerality, and an anxious celebration of difference.<sup>27</sup> For Harvey, postmodernism then is not indicative of a historical break but a cultural reflection of yet “another fierce round in that process of annihilation of space through time that has always lain at the center of capitalism’s dynamic” (1989, p. 293).

Another spatial implication of this shift to flexible accumulation has been the creation of different kinds of spatiality, as well as the production of “uneven geographical development.” Like Lefebvre, Harvey embraces a relational rather than absolute view on space, which allows for an analysis of space as “actively produced and as an active moment within the social process” (2006, p. 77). This points to the ways “capital accumulation [...] creates not only spaces but different forms of spatiality [e.g. financial markets in cyberspace]” (2006, p. 77). Harvey’s critique of neoliberalism ties it to global spatial inequality. Neoliberalism’s discourse of ‘freedom’ (of exchange, contract) has been used to secure consent to the exploitative dimensions of its political economic practices or it has

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<sup>27</sup> Notice space here is equated with distance. Massey (2005) argues against this interpretation of Marx’s ‘annihilation of space by time.’

simply been imposed. Neoliberalism is “impelled *through* mechanisms of uneven geographical development” (2005, p. 87). Harvey explains this as part of a longer history of territorial struggles in the history of capitalism that includes colonization and imperialism. Space is crucial because “any struggle to reconstitute power relations is a struggle to reorganize their spatial bases,” that is why, he explains citing Deleuze and Guattari, capitalism is endlessly deterritorializing and reterritorializing (1989, p. 238). Though manifested differently in different parts of the world, rising socioeconomic inequality, environmental degradation and the violation of human rights are the norm under neoliberalism.

Because time-space compression makes spatial barriers less important and because everything has become commodified, “... the greater the sensitivity of capital to the variations of place within space, and the greater the incentive for places to be differentiated in ways attractive to capital” (1989, p. 295). A local example of this are the *Programa Nacional Fronterizo*, or National Border Program (1961), the *Programa de Industrialización Fronteriza*, or Border Industrialization Program (1965), and NAFTA (1994) initiatives put forth by the Mexican government that made special economic zones out of Northern Mexican cities as a way of attracting foreign investment (in the form of *maquiladoras*—production and assembly plants/sweatshops). This kind of differentiation (in this case, the creation of economic zones) has led to uneven development, itself another kind of spatial differentiation.

While the concept of “time-space compression” is useful in thinking further about the ways capitalism and globalization have transformed space and time, producing great inequality, I agree with Massey’s critique, arguing against its homogeneity and unidimensionality. (Though critical of capitalism, Harvey’s perspective is rooted in the bird’s-eye view approach to theory de Certeau and Lefebvre warned about). This concept reduces the experience of space to capital movement, ignoring the many social factors involved in

how people experience space and place (e.g. race, gender, culture, etc.). That is to say, different people experience time-space compression differently; and this difference has to do with more than spatial difference as it relates to capital. Harvey's formulation ignores the "power geometry" involved in the production of time-space compression, which places different social groups and people within these global flows and interconnections in complex and (often unequal) varied ways. As Massey explains, some groups have more control to initiate flows and movements and gain more power and influence because of it, while others may be doing some of the moving (e.g. migrants, refugees) and yet have little power over their movements, while still others may even be imprisoned by these global flows. This raises the important question of the relationship between mobility, privilege, and power, where "the mobility and control of some groups can actively weaken other people [...] the time-space compression of some groups can undermine the power of others" (1994, p. 150).

In the context of *la Linea*, the effects of the expansion of the state penal apparatus concomitant with neoliberalism (Wacquant, 2012) are manifest in increasingly restrictive U.S. Customs and Border Protection policies and operations at 'Ports of Entry.' Present day CBP operations include increased and diversified high-tech surveillance, reflecting the growing state concern for "national security" in a post-9/11 era plagued with mass migration and displacement due to war and economic inequality across the world, often brought about by a neoliberal agenda. At the same time, neoliberalism commands the unrestricted mobility of certain economic actors and produces (reinforces) the synthesis between citizen and consumer. Following Wacquant's definition of neoliberalism as "an articulation of state, market and citizenship that harnesses the first to impose the stamp of the second onto the third" (2012), we can see how the neoliberal securitization paradoxical logic of restriction and mobility is reflected in the CBP dictum of "secure borders, open doors." CBP deploys a

discourse of security and il/legality to justify exclusion and inequality in the border crossing experience. Only those that are deemed economically viable are allowed entry, and those with the highest viability are granted quicker access. Thus the San Ysidro checkpoint operates as a classification and sorting facility, as a punitive sieve, allowing desirable-profitable goods and people through, while discarding or incarcerating the rest.

The time-space of capitalism is one of compression as Harvey noted, a “speed-up in the pace of life, while so overcoming spatial barriers that the world seems to collapse inwards upon us” (1989, p. 240). We have already seen that space is not annihilated by time, but the time of capitalism is one of expedition. And while the border checkpoint is a site where competing but inseparable market and state interests converge, slowness—not speed—is the norm. Waiting then becomes a way for the state to discipline and control the border crosser. The ability to move across the border remains a privileged, but conditional position.

Lefebvre proposed the notion of “lived space”—how people creatively reimagine their sensual and practical experience of space—to represent ways of challenging the impositions of the “conceived space” created by the state. Border crosses have little power over the rules put forth by CBP when crossing, as they are subject to inspection, detention or rejection. And yet people find ways to make the border their own by honking or ‘talking back’ at officers, engaging in minor contraband of food, dodging wait times by cutting in line, using bicycles, motorcycles, or walking canes, giving birth, making friends and forming social bonds, protesting and closing the border down, making artistic interventions, etc. As we will see, crossing the border also involves constant reflection on the act of crossing itself, making it an emphatic example of the potential of “lived space.” On their end, vendors are one step removed (so to speak) from the effects of the checkpoint regime. They cater to

biological (food, restrooms) and social (shopping, conversation) needs of those crossing, and give a very different meaning to the life of the Line. *La Linea* for vendors is a job, but it is also a home. And one only needs to wander around the market or the cars waiting in line to understand this border is very much alive and “lived.”

The third space as a lived and practiced space is of primary importance to phenomenologists. Yi-Fu Tuan (1977/2001) is credited with revitalizing the field of human geography in the seventies with his humanistic and metaphysical approaches to geography and his focus on subjective experience. Borrowing implicitly from phenomenology, Tuan argued that humans came to know the world through subjective experience and perception of their environments. According to Tuan, our corporeal experience and culturally defined orientations of place and time shape our imaginative and affective ties to places. These ties are essential to our understanding of place as a grounded and homely space. Tuan distinguishes between space and place, where space is an open, abstract arena for action and place is a lived and experienced point in space. Edward Relph (1976) was more explicit in his ties to phenomenology, building on Heidegger’s concept of dwelling, explaining place determines human experience because people gain consciousness of themselves and the world *in place*. Relph warned that increased mobility in the modern world endangered places (spaces filled with meaning), creating a sense of placelessness. In a similar vein, decades later anthropologist Marc Augé (1992/2009) proposed that “supermodernity” (a kind of postmodernity)—with its lack of ties to the past and historically defined meanings—produced “non-places,” or non-relational, non-historical, non-identity based places such as airports, malls, highways, etc. This proposition runs counter to the relational perspective on space that underscores the importance of bodily and affective experiences in places, as contemporary phenomenologist Edward Casey (1996) has argued, we are both a part of and

constituted by places. Because we always exist in place, how we experience the world becomes an important way to learn not only about place but ourselves. Understanding place is therefore an existential necessity.

What kinds of spatialities are produced in *la Línea*? What kind of place is the border? It's the place of paradox, where opposing dynamics exist simultaneously: deterritorialization, territorialization, abstraction, concreteness, fragmentation, continuity, movement, stasis, and so on. It's also the place of convergence, where things meet to get along or fight. It is a place of and for classification, consumption, walking, waiting, boredom, leisure, and performance all at once.

### **Border Studies**

Border studies are an interdisciplinary field that encompasses all disciplines whose main area of research is the border and/or border phenomena. For this study I focus on anthropological work on borders, and work on the US-Mexico border specifically. I also take a broad look at cultural and literary studies on the literature, art, and other creative works about this border. As mentioned earlier, I engage the major debate in border studies—the critique of the use of the border as metaphor—and propose that the border should be approached and understood both symbolically and materially.<sup>28</sup>

The field of border studies in the United States arose from the publication of Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: the New Mestiza* (1987) in the context of what would

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<sup>28</sup> The work of Anzaldúa (1989), Behar (1993), Limon (1994) and Rosaldo (1989, 1997) address these concerns directly, linking the material realities of subjects' and their own border(ed) selves with poetic dimensions of experience. Like other feminist, postmodern, visual, and literarily inclined anthropologists, they raise issues around subjectivity, positionality, and "native" anthropology, suggesting new and experimental forms of writing and ethnographic representation to address these issues. While these scholars' works center on physical borders and writing, the issues raised resonate precisely because they surround other borders within and beyond anthropology. Considering this, as well as anthropology's longstanding connection with literature and the poetic—what is the place of a phenomenological and filmic approach to the study of borders by a so-called "native" anthropologist?



become Chicano Studies. A groundbreaking account of her in-between existence as a Tejana, Chicana, woman-loving woman living between two distinct linguistic, political, and cultural worlds, she contests the subordination of *mexicanos* in the United States and the patriarchy and heteronormativity in both Mexican and American cultures. She links these oppressions to a longer history of colonization and reclaims the land of the American Southwest, Aztlán, as indigenous and Mexican. The form of this text reflects its subject, mixing autobiography, poetry, essay forms, as well as the use of multiple languages and dialects—an anti-canonical stance and rejection of “English-only” educational policies. By poetically reflecting on her personal experience, Anzaldúa’s work brought to light the intersections of capitalism, patriarchy and white supremacy. Her work is a political stance celebrating Chicana identity, “a new *mestiza* consciousness,” that encompasses conflict, contradiction, ambiguity and challenges the normal. This consciousness is born out of the borderlands:

The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. (p. 25)

There are several key ideas that emerge from this definition that heavily influenced the study of borders in the 1990s (especially in cultural studies and anthropology) and continue to this day; 1) the political economic asymmetry between the U.S. and Mexico produces a kind of political and cultural violence, 2) the conflict in this zone is generative, it produces a unique

'border culture', 3) the nature of a border is to mark difference and exclude under the guise of 'national security', 4) the border is characterized by and produces flux and ambivalence, and finally 5) borders, as limits and edges of nations, are where the peripheral or subaltern reside. Some of these claims, or rather, the ways these claims have been used in scholarship, have been the subject of much criticism. The most common critique leveled at Anzaldúa is against her essentialist and romantic portrayal of indigenous Mexican culture and her portrayal of a unitary Chicano/a and border experience (Michaelsen & Johnson, 1997). She is also often remembered as the one who opened the door to the use of the border as a metaphor, and therefore also to some of the questionable work in border cultural studies. While there's much to critique in Anzaldúa's work, my intention here is to underline the importance of her contribution. *Borderlands* remains a definitive text in any study of borders or Chicano culture. Perhaps this is why the complexity of her theory often remains buried under one-line references. For Anzaldúa's work is lasting not because it spawned an area of academic study, but because in it she succeeded in articulating an intricate understanding of the border—conceptualizations that remain in circulation and have even become unremarkable within and outside academia, notions that are relevant to the lived reality of the border even today...maybe Anzaldúa did tap into a kind of border essence after all.

In a similar vein, anthropologist Renato Rosaldo (1989) challenged the notion of cultures as bounded, isolated, static and homogenous. He proposed instead that cultures are always changing, heterogeneously constituted, and not linked to a single society—that is, a unitary "American culture" is inexistent. Rosaldo also proposed 'relational knowledge,' complicating the distinction between self and other, insisting on the acknowledgment of the social analyst's positionality and subject's own analysis of the ethnographic encounter, akin to phenomenologists' notion of intersubjectivity. He explains our own sense of self is

complex and made up of various internal social borders, "...our everyday lives are crisscrossed by border zones, pockets, and eruptions of all kinds. [...] Along with "our" supposedly transparent cultural selves, such borderlands should be regarded not as analytically empty transitional zones but as sites of creative cultural production that require investigation" (pp. 207-208). Like Anzaldúa, what is at stake for Rosaldo is an examination of the imbrication between culture and power, and the ways people who have not fit dominant conceptions of national or ethnic identities have been rendered invisible, cultureless, or otherwise inferior.

Their work on borders inspired others, giving rise to Chicano Studies, and opening up cultural studies scholars to discuss U.S. identity and culture as inherently mixed and full of conflict. For historians and folklorists, studying the history of the U.S.-Mexico border from the perspective of *mexicanos* and Chicanos in the American West meant linking 19<sup>th</sup> century American colonialist enterprises (Manifest Destiny and historian Frederick Jackson Turner's "Frontier Thesis" (1893/2010), and the Mexican-American War) to contemporary xenophobic discourses against undocumented migrants in the U.S. For literary scholar Jose David Saldívar, the borderlands presented "a model for a new kind of U.S. cultural studies [and American Studies], and one that challenges the homogeneity of U.S. nationalism and popular culture (1997, p. ix)" and is the beginning to a comparative "intercultural studies" (1997, p. 12), a view he expanded to global cultural studies in his latest work (2011). The emphasis here is on resistance, because the aim is to challenge the "stable, naturalized, and hegemonic status of the national by looking at the assumed equivalence [between] the national and the cultural" (Saldívar, 1997, p. 14), thereby highlighting historical and contemporary social inequality in the U.S.

For anthropologists, this surge in thought on dynamic and contradictory cultures and identities with relation to the border, merged with concurrent conversations about postcoloniality and hybridity (Bhabha, 1990a, 1994; García Canclini, 1989), deterritorialization (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987), the sociopolitical changes brought about by globalization and transnational migration (Appadurai, 1996; Harvey, 1989; Kearney, 1995), provided an entry point to discussing “the fiction of cultures as discrete, object-like phenomena occupying discrete spaces [because this] becomes implausible for those who inhabit the borderlands” (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992, p. 7). The border—with its border crossing, border-defying community ties, and hybrid identities—offered the possibility of discussing the ways challenges to national culture and the state, and changes in global communication and transport technologies were transforming the conventional anthropological categories of culture and difference. Alvarez explains, “[The Mexican-US] border [became] the icon and model for research into other borders as well as for the elaboration and refinement of the boundaries of several salient concepts and their referents [culture, community, and identity]” (1995, p. 449). Moreover, this led to an emphasis on “paradox, conflict, and contradiction” as a way of challenging an oppressive nation-state (1995, p. 449).

Many scholars, particularly anthropologists, rejected this use of the border as a metaphor for border crossing, cultural fluidity, hybridity, etc. (Heyman, 1994; Lugo, 2000; Romero, 1993; Vila, 2000, 2003). The problem, according to Heyman is that “...when the border is condensed to an image, and when this image symbolizes the wide-ranging political or theoretical stances, understanding the border becomes reductive and delocalized” (1994, p. 44). That is, abstracting the border from its material location to use it as an analytical framework that applies to objects of analysis other than itself risks reducing the border to

those metaphorical meanings. Furthermore, geographers Neil Smith and Cindy Katz (1993) explain how “metaphors work by invoking one meaning system to explain or clarify another. The first meaning system is apparently concrete, well understood, unproblematic [...] the second is elusive, opaque, seemingly unfathomable, without [the] meaning donated [from the first]” (p. 69). By unproblematically presenting the border as metaphor, its meaning is not only reduced, but fixed and taken for granted. Put another way, ignoring the complexities of the border on ground ultimately rendered it meaningless. At the time, this was an especially poignant critique because few studies were actually being conducted along the physical border. With the exception of northern Mexican scholars, even fewer studies were being conducted on the Mexican side. This led some to argue this was another instance of American hegemony, with U.S. scholars’ north-to-south perspective dominating conceptualizations of the border (Vila, 2000).

Moreover, while abstractions of the border were often attempts to challenge oppressive discourses on national culture and state functions, the effect, many argued, was quite the opposite. The metaphorical emphasis on celebratory post-national border fluidity and porosity mimic “the dichotomy between globalization and the nation-state [that] has also been central to neo-liberal discourses of globalization, which are designed to promote minimal state intervention into the operations of private corporations,” thereby reaffirming neoliberal tenets (Sadowski-Smith, 2002, p. 4). In addition, their non-site specific, delocalized nature portrays a uniform kind of globalization that doesn’t account for the socioeconomic inequalities inherent to neoliberal policies, which plague the U.S.-Mexico border.<sup>29</sup>

Recent border studies approach the subjects of commerce and labor (Chavez, 2016; Mora & Dávila, 2009, 2011; McCrossen, 2009; Muriá Tuñón, 2010; Orraca Romano, 2015)

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<sup>29</sup> Claire F. Fox (1999) makes a similar argument in her work on literary and artistic representations of the U.S.-Mexico border in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

in the context of neoliberal globalization and its asymmetries (Alegria, 2009; Lugo, 2008), as well as the ways these processes shape border resident identities (Kun & Montezemolo, 2012; Ortiz-Gonzalez, 2003; Sadowski-Smith, 2008; Velasco Ortiz & Contreras, 2011; Vila, 2005; Yeh, 2017a, 2017b). A growing area of study is state surveillance and control in relation to neoliberal economic policies and post 9/11 state security practices (Donnan & Wilson, 2010; Pallitto & Heyman, 2008). Current studies, therefore, recognize the joint role of the global economy and state actors, noting borders play a key role in defining broader political, economic, and cultural processes. In these accounts, border exchange and connection are contextualized in the broader scheme of transnational and local socioeconomic asymmetries and power.

For Alvarez (2012) this shift to the “materiality” of the border has its own set of problems. He posits that the exclusive focus on the geopolitical line “reproduces the state-centric focus on security and the maintenance of boundaries” (p. 30). The new emphasis induces a kind of “bounded-horizontality” presenting a linear and one-dimensional understanding of the border as simply a mechanism of state control (p. 26). This material emphasis of the border therefore “...has constructed a different type of barrier, which constricts the imagination, the interpretation and the understanding of social process” (p. 28). Alvarez calls for a deeper and multidimensional border epistemology that goes “beyond the border” and recognizes “the various borders that relate to the larger questions of the nation state, its influences, and power” (p. 31). He proposes the metaphor of “borders and bridges,” which he hopes will encompass the border as more than a dividing line between two nation-states, while recognizing border processes have broader global connections that may or may not happen along this line. “Bridges” can therefore help us understand border

processes as nodal or part of a network that connect “the diverse and disparate, as well as history and meaning, [of] people and places” (p. 38).

While I don’t favor Alvarez’ metaphor there are two important points that can be gleaned from his attempt to connect both material and imaginative perspectives. First, borders are related to the state, but they are not coterminous. Relatedly, regulatory state control and classification of movement is not limited to its borders. Scholars have noted border systems such as checkpoints and citizen/non-citizen—legal/illegal classifications are increasingly deployed within the nation-state to control domestic populations beyond geopolitical borders (Amoore et al., 2008; Cunningham & Heyman, 2004; Heyman, 2004; Mezzadra & Nielson, 2013; Sparke, 2006). Second, Alvarez recognized that the central aspect of what happens on or around either side of the Line might not always be directly related to the geopolitical border. He explains works are often classified as “border studies” due to the immediacy of the border when the work is actually about a much broader “deep belonging and identification with place—a bridging and continuous connection of everyday life, of social and cultural activity” (p. 34). This is where cultural geographer’s notion of place/space and phenomenologist’s conception of lifeworld or meshwork can help untangle the relationship between the border as a particular place and the place of the border.

For its part, Tijuana continues to be the largest and fastest growing Mexican municipality along the border, yet it has been the focus of few anthropological studies (Huth, 2013; Merchant Ley, 2017; Olmos Aguilera, 2007; Price, 1973; Vizcarra, 2016; Yeh, 2009, 2012, 2017a, 2017b).<sup>30</sup> Qualitative work with commuter border crossers—those who cross the border legally and regularly—is limited (Lugo, 2008; Martinez, 1994; Vila, 2000), with

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<sup>30</sup> An abundance of sociological and demographic studies focused primarily around migrant populations, gender issues, art and popular culture have been conducted in Tijuana in no small part thanks to the Colegio de la Frontera Norte who trains and supports local academics, and welcomes border scholars from all over the world. Ethnographies based on long-term participant observation, however, are rare.

few studies conducted in the Tijuana/San Diego region (Chavez, 2016; Heyman, 2004; Murià Tuñón, 2010; Velasco Ortiz & Contreras, 2011; Vizcarra, 2016). While there is data on Tijuana commuters, it has been gathered primarily by local chambers of commerce and national census agencies, and used in demographic studies of the region focused on cross-border economic and labor ties and asymmetries (Alegría, 2002, 2009; Escala Rabadán & Vega Briones, 2005; Herzog, 1990; Mora & Dávila, 2009, 2011; Orraca Romano, 2015; Vega Briones, 2016), as well as on urban youth education and cross-border family structures (Marquez & Romo, 2008; Ojeda, 2009; Ojeda de la Peña & Zavala Cosio, 2011; Utley Garcia & Lopez Estrada, 2013; Vargas-Valle, 2012; Vargas-Valle & Coubès, 2017). Ethnographic work about Tijuana border crossers is hence very limited.<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, while commerce has existed along and at the border since it came to be and the region's economy remains a big topic of interest, there are few studies on local or 'micro' border economies (McCrosen, 2009; Murià Tuñón, 2010; Murià & Chavez, 2011; Staudt, 1998), with none focused on the commercial activity surrounding border checkpoints—even in Tijuana, home to the largest checkpoint. Though hyper-visible, border vendors themselves remain a largely ignored group. Journalists have taken the lead on these topics, recently arriving to report on the social and commercial activity of the San Ysidro border checkpoint (Dibble, 2016; Fulton, 2014; Levinson, 2017; Wagner, 2015; Zaragoza, 2016). By examining border vendors' work phenomenologically in this study, and not

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<sup>31</sup> Diverse in every way and always evolving against their structural circumstances, the habitual 'border crosser,' is a figure that is notoriously hard to pin down. Along the border, academic studies have focused on the south to north movements of the worker, the student, and the consumer, who while residing in Mexico cross the border almost daily to engage in their respective activities. Notably, border crossers may fit more than one of these three categories simultaneously or at different points in their lives, and remain very demographically varied. They have been dubbed 'cross-border workers,' 'commuters,' *transfronterizos*, 'transmigrants,' 'transborder students,' and the like. I prefer the lackluster, vague, and all-encompassing term of 'border crosser,' but also often use 'commuter,' to evoke this group's heterogeneity, the frequency and everyday nature of their travel, and to foreground the action/practice of crossing and its temporal dimensions. While my work here focuses on a tiny, non-representative group, I believe their insights into the phenomenology of crossing are relevant, if not generalizable, to the larger group.



through the lens of ‘labor’ and larger political economic structures, I aim to foreground a different kind of work, namely, the work of living, or what Lefebvre, de Certeau, and others observed and critiqued as (the political economy of) “everyday life.” This dissertation therefore also contributes to the anthropology from and about Tijuana.

**Revolver (the border as action).** *Cuánto dinero me diste que revolví tus cosas con las mías?* (How much money did you give me because I mixed up my things with yours?) Manuel asks Fernando before they begin discussing money and purchased goods at length in my film footage. Re-watching this interaction, I wondered if Manuel had intentionally mixed up the money in case Fernando could not remember, and he could keep a little extra. But Fernando revealed his accounting prowess as he detailed exact amounts of both pesos and dollars given. Limits are reestablished. There is a Mexican saying that alludes to this: *cuentas claras, amistades largas*, meaning something along the lines of clear dealings make for long friendships. I have always read tension in this instance of Manuel and Fernando sorting out their finances; a reaffirmation of employee and employer roles, a making sure nobody is taking advantage of the other in order to maintain a harmonious relationship. This is indeed the case, but I later realized that this moment also makes a broader statement about selfhood, relationships, and their limits. *Revolví tus cosas con las mías* (I mixed up my things with yours). Where do you end and I begin? Help me figure out how to untangle our things so I can redefine our relationship and myself. As a filmmaker, a lone person holding a camera in front of them, this mixing or mix up is also present in the filmmaking process. How do these exchanges and relations come together in the film and in real life? Moreover, what does walking or remaining still with a camera while I followed subjects in this site—in effect, my film materials and methodology—reveal about border life and how borders operate more broadly?

The aforementioned exchange between Manuel and Fernando took place exactly on the political boundary between Mexico and the U.S., right on the line, reminding us that borders simultaneously divide and unite. Lines bring together and separate; they create confusion, ambiguity, and often conflict. *Revuelven, pues. Revolver* means “to mix, to toss, to stir,” but it also connotes trouble. *Se me revolvió el estomago* (I’m sick to my stomach). *El pueblo se revuelve* (the people stir, they rise in revolt). Mixing means fussing with boundaries and produces great unease because it disturbs an established order and creates ambiguity. Thus, *revolver* turns things over in a defiant rebellion, but it also involves a forced revolve, a re-turn. *Volver* means ‘to return, come back, start again’, *re-volver* then can also mean ‘to return again,’ a double return. Revolver then is cyclical, restless, neurotic. It is turning things over in your head, retracing mental paths, thoughts; it is reconsidering as a way of understanding something better. One returns to the previous starting point to reflect on the mixture, assess the damage to the original parts, and see what new thing was created from the initial boundary mix-up. Yet this reflexive return is explanatory in nature, a conceptual re-ordering of what has been disordered. And so any act of *revolver* involves a combination of opposing forces and insists upon what can be referred to as cyclical reflexivity: it requires a return to your previous starting point so you may be able to sort out the mess created, place another limit, a new border that will inevitably become “mixed up” in the future.

I propose that this action, or force of *revolver*, is behind the paradoxical dynamics of mobility and waiting that characterize the San Ysidro checkpoint; a tension between movement—and lack thereof—that becomes evident and practiced through a phenomenological filmic approach. Walking with vendors and border crossers with a camera reveals how categories of stasis and movement fuse and bleed onto one another, *se revuelven*, at the same time that they remain distinct and clearly demarcated experiences of this place.

This mix-up is also evident when looking at performances taking place at the checkpoint—classifications of audience-spectator versus performer-actor, of theater-stage versus everyday practice are challenged. It's also worth noting that beyond the act of film as representation, the process of filmmaking itself carries the force of *revolver*, a performance of cyclical reflexivity.

Film reflects in the sense that it has this ability to “mirror” reality through a live action capture of the slippery boundaries between subjects’ movement and rest. But beyond its mimetic qualities, the medium of film can manifest both “meaning and being,” or reflexive and pre-reflexive (pre-theoretical) perspectives, simultaneously (MacDougall, 2006). Additionally, my film work is also a kind of meditation on and in these life moments, a reflection that occurs in the filmmaking process itself through the encounter with subjects, as we walk together or as I follow them. Repetition here is revelatory because following a subject with a camera, or *volver a andar lo andado*<sup>32</sup> (to walk what has been already walked) of a subject’s everyday life, can reveal something of what it means to “make place,” how people encounter and give meaning to places (Feld & Basso, 1996).

**A conceptual taxonomy of “border.”** As I’ve already mentioned, the concept of border in cultural studies and anthropology has been exhaustively discussed, but rarely thoroughly defined and often employed as metaphor. The U.S.-Mexico border region in particular has been the subject of much research, as a site where the understanding of various concepts such as culture and identity have been refined over the years, contributing to this space’s iconic status in border studies (Alvarez, 1995, 2012). In this section I will discuss how the concept of border has been variously defined and described, as well as the

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<sup>32</sup> This is one of the definitions of the word *revolver* in the dictionary of the Real Academia Española.

characteristics and functions that have been attributed to it, in order to clarify the term and contextualize my proposition for thinking of the border as action, or *revolver*.

In his proposal of *transfronteras* (transborders), sociologist Valenzuela Arce (2014) articulates a similar approach to thinking about borders, proposing a set of theoretical parameters based on previous studies on cultural processes along borders.<sup>33</sup> My framework is broader and more elemental, focusing on the functions of borders in various conceptions in order to understand them beyond their instantiations between nation-states and other sociopolitical categories.

In their work of *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* (2013) political scientists Mezzadra and Nielson challenge the recent emphasis on the exclusionary function of geopolitical borders (including the symbolic emphasis on walls and fences), proposing instead that we are witnessing changes to the notion of inclusion. The “differential inclusion” of borders, they argue, reconfigures the “production of labor power as a commodity” (pp. 20-21) and by extension the categories of citizenship and subjectivity. What is of particular interest to me is that they also present a compelling case for looking at border beyond its status as an object of research and propose to approach it instead as an “epistemological device” (p. 16). By this they don’t set out to deny the materiality or particularity of borders or disregard empirical research, but rather aim to underscore the ways the object of study has been constituted and taken for granted. Mezzadra and Nielson also question the notion of method by recognizing both how “methods tend to produce (often in contradictory and unexpected ways) the worlds they claim to describe,” (p. 17) and the politics of methods, themselves a way of producing particular knowledge about borders. For them, method “is as much about acting on the world as it is about knowing it,” and “the relation of action to

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<sup>33</sup> Valenzuela Arce puts forward the concepts of “conjunction, disjunction, connectivity, injunction, contact zone, translation, cultural switch, acculturation, transculturation, and cultural hybridity” (2014, p. 7).

knowledge in a situation where many different knowledge regimes and practices come into conflict” (p. 17). “Border as method,” then, “involves negotiating the boundaries between the different kinds of knowledge that come to bear on the border and, in so doing, aims to throw light on the subjectivities that come into being through such conflicts” (pp. 17-18). This epistemological approach to borders is crucial if we are going to understand what’s going on with borders and give them their proper place, so to speak, as objects of study and as knowledge practices.

Borders are already systems of classifications; as such, these categorizations are somewhat arbitrary, and so certain authors and terms often incorporate more than one of the elements described below. Despite a certain degree of arbitrariness, I find highlighting various distinctions is an important exercise to clarify this concept that is at once ambiguous and highly prescriptive. Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) cite Balibar (2002) on the difficulty of defining border:

The idea of a simple definition of what constitutes a border is, by definition, absurd: to mark out a border is precisely, to define a territory, to delimit it, and so to register the identity of that territory, or confer one upon it. Conversely, however, to define or identity in general is nothing other than to trace a border, to assign boundaries or borders (in Greek, *boros*; in Latin, *finis* or *terminus*; in German, *Grenze*; in French, *borne*). The theorist who attempts to define what a border is is in danger of going round in circles, as the very representation of the border is the precondition for any definition. (p. 76/in Balibar, 2002, p. 16)

I share this appreciation for the paradox of the border. The obsession with definition or fixing meaning is part of what has fueled debates in border studies. While it’s important to note the usefulness and necessity of “cognitive borders” (Mezzadra & Neilson)—I am

proposing a conceptual taxonomy here, after all—I am not so much interested in attempting to define borders as I am in articulating how they work, what they do, how they happen. It's true, as Balibar notes, that border talk tends to 'go around in circles' and this is not a coincidence. As I will show below, this is part of how borders function—they are cyclical in nature. When we link this cyclicity to cognition or consciousness, we can talk about reflection, or reflexivity in an anthropological sense.

*The border as division.* This version underscores the real or metaphorical line used to separate one thing from another, or the distinction between places, ideas, objects, and subjects. The main facet of this category is difference. Difference is often what we think about when we consider geopolitical boundaries between nation-states, whether it involves cultural/ethnic, economic, linguistic, or religious differences. The border as division may also involve asymmetry and inequality, but not necessarily.

*The border as boundary.* Closely related to the border "as division," this definition is predicated on exclusion and relates to police state functions such as border entry/exit surveillance and the militarization of national borders. State surveillance and control in relation to neoliberal economic policies and post-9/11 national security practices is a growing area of border studies (Donnan & Wilson, 2010; Pallitto & Heyman, 2008). This category contextualizes cross-border exchange and connection in broader transnational socioeconomic asymmetries and inequality (Alegria, 2009; Lugo, 2008). For some, however, this emphasis on surveillance demonstrates an almost exclusive shift to the material dimensions of the border, which reproduces a limited understanding of the border as solely a mechanism of state control without regard to other aspects of border residents' lived experience (Alvarez, 2012).

*The border as contact.* This presents another key function of boundaries: while they divide, lines imply contact by the fact of their adjacency. This category of border implies connection through movement, usually of people, as in the case of migration, though also of ideas and goods. Analyses of colonialism often discuss borders as spaces defined by conflict, domination, and clashes of cultures, as is seen in Anzaldúa's (1987) famous "borderlands," as well as Pratt's (1992) "contact zones." Postcolonial studies theorize bordered contact as racial/ethnic and cultural mixing through the concepts of *mestizaje* (Anzaldúa, 1987), creolization (Glissant, 2008), and hybridity (Bhabha, 1990a, 1990b, 1994; Young, 1995). García Canclini (1989) introduced a more harmonious version of cultural contact in his proposal of cultural hybridity, an exultation of a kind of modern multiculturalism devoid of analyses of power.

The border as place for/of contact was essential to the emergence of border studies, as it challenged conceptions of the analytic categories of culture and cultural difference (self-here/other-there), pushing scholars to rethink cultural difference through connectivity (Anzaldúa, 1987; Rosaldo, 1989), to examine in detail the diversity of identities and social groups along the border (Valenzuela Arce, 1988, 1992, 1998a, 1998b, 2003a, 2003b, 2009), as well as other social phenomena including art and music (Olmos Aguilera, 2011, 2012; Perez-Taylor, Olmos Aguilera, & Salas Quintana, 2007; Valenzuela Arce, 2002, 2004). This surge in thought on dynamic and contradictory cultures and identities with relation to the border, combined with the sociopolitical changes brought about by globalization and transnational migration (Appadurai, 1996; Harvey, 1989; Kearney, 1995), provided an entry point for discussing the fiction of discrete nation-states with unitary national cultures (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992).

To reiterate, the border, as site of contradictory and conflictive contact, evolved to become conceptual shorthand used to challenge oppressive systems and structures of power such as the nation-state, capitalism, and patriarchy. However, while abstractions of the border were often attempts to disrupt the hegemony of the nation-state, the effect, some scholars argued, was the opposite. The emphasis on border fluidity and porosity, signaling a ‘weakening’ state, mimics the neoliberal discourse of globalization that promotes a dichotomized view of the nation-state and global processes to limit state intervention of the private sector (Sadowski-Smith, 2002). It was also argued that a de-localized conception of the border runs the risk of portraying globalization as uniform, without accounting for the socioeconomic inequalities inherent in neoliberal policies plaguing many international borders, including the U.S.-Mexico border (Fox, 1999).

*The border as edge/limit.* The border as edge or limit is closely associated to the definition of “frontier.” It is a space of the unknown and of possibility. As a kind of horizon, and because of its mysterious qualities, it evokes freedom and desire. As peripheral and marginal, it implies a center. It is thus often linked to colonial and imperialist enterprises, such as Manifest Destiny, or Turner’s (1893/2010) triumphalist “Frontier Thesis,” which narrate the importance of westward expansion to ideals of liberalism and democracy in the U.S. Of note are the ways postcolonial and subaltern scholars have used this conception of border precisely to undermine this colonial element (Bhabha, 1990b, 1994). Other scholars have also found the ever-evolving and never-quite-there nature of horizons as a useful analytical tool for describing transformative moments or states. For example, Turner’s (1986) “liminality,” Crapanzano’s (2004) “imaginative horizon,” Saldivar’s (2011) “trans-americanity,” and Valenzuela Arce’s (2014) “transfrontera” all demonstrate the space of movement and openness possible along what are perceived to be edges.



The border as site of edge and limit is particularly compelling due to its paradoxical quality: elements of edge—openness and possibility—coexist with notions of limit—end and fixity—in this framework. The coexistence of contradictory elements contains slippages. And it is this endless back and forth and ongoing process of transformation that allows for analyses that resemble a more indeterminate and ambiguous understanding of life.

*The border as in-between.* This quality is closely tied to the border as edge/limit because it describes a paradoxical process of slippage. This characteristic implies ambivalence through the simultaneous unity and division of border. Like the border as contact, it implies movement through connection. But like the border as division, it also implies separation and difference. Its elements and properties are not only described as different, but rather as completely opposite and paradoxical. The instability and imbalance of the paradox created by the coexistence of opposite qualities is often associated with generative possibilities because for a paradox to exist these contradictory elements need to be unified at some point, or in certain moments. Thus, the dance between balance and imbalance is ongoing, dynamic, and kinetic.

Many scholars, including many previously cited, discuss the border or border processes as in-between. The “power of the between” (Stoller, 2008) lies in the creative and generative potential of ambivalence and ambiguity. Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* (1987) explains the Náhuatl word *nepantla* as the land in-between, an unstable, liminal place. Her call for a *mestiza* consciousness—a liberatory transformation in perception and understanding of the world born out of dwelling in *nepantla*—was predicated on the power of tolerance for ambiguity. She states:

The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity [...] Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence

into something else [...] That focal point or fulcrum, that juncture where the *mestiza* stands, is where phenomena tend to collide [...] In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness—a *mestiza* consciousness—and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm. (1987, 102)

Borders are compelling because they are understood to harness certain powers. The border is a kind of fetish. Here, Anzaldúa's *mestiza* consciousness is a bordered expression grounded in human existence; for her, the border is the self. Living with uncertainty and contradiction, in essence living in conflict, necessitates rebalancing to maintain a kind of homeostasis of the self. The moments of balance, or synthesis, are moment of understanding, of a new consciousness. This moment, however, cannot be maintained in a border-self, eventually giving way to the previous process of ambivalence where things collide. The power of the border then lies in its ability to endlessly disrupt paradigms, an essential quality in the process of knowledge production.

*The border que revuelve.* My understanding of border draws from previous conceptual articulations, but differs in that it emphasizes border as action: the movement arising from being on the verge, a movement that results from an ongoing or cyclical reflexivity that in the end returns to ambiguity. It is rooted in the physical space of the border—this process is visible at the U.S.-Mexican border, for example—but is observable in places, moments, and situations beyond geopolitical boundaries because borders exist all around us. The force of *revolver* foregrounds the destructive and generative nature of in-

betweenness: mixing two and often opposing elements involves breaking down these elements in order to generate new knowledge.

As the term suggests, *re-volver* involves constant reflection; without reflexivity, there is no border. By its nature, “border” refuses a clear explanation because it is a process that exceeds its own definition. Border is self-referential, which creates slippages, as the term holds various meanings and contradictory connotations. Again, and paradoxically, these same ambivalences are what we attempt to contain by using borders. The most basic function of a border is to delineate, divide, and separate in order to define and explain. Yet it is impossible to attach it to any single meaning. It doesn’t *define*—or, bring to an end (“finis”)—it remains ambiguous. Border thus opens and limits its own meaning.

### Methods

For this project I used the methods of participant observation, semi-structured interview, and filmmaking. Anthropological encounters and filmmaking were not only the methods, but also the mediums. Scholarship is a medium<sup>34</sup> that like other conventionally artistic mediums facilitates our attempts to make (sense) with the world. I am thus presenting this work as a creative expression not only in an artistic sense, but also in the sense that all intellectual work is generative and creative by nature. The study of borders, with their emphasis on the fussing of boundaries and reflexivity, drives this need for a multimodal approach. A creative approach is also necessary when one considers the generative qualities not only of the border, but also of experience and place. In this way, this project also follows the notion of “thirdspace” (Soja, 1996; Lefebvre, 1974/1991), emphasizing the importance of creating and ‘making with’ the realities we inhabit to reveal injustices, assumptions, and new ways of seeing and understanding *la Linea*.

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<sup>34</sup> Fahamu Pecou (2013) in conversation.

The observations, descriptions, and information gathered here are based on two years of anthropological study between February 2014 and October 2016. The border checkpoint is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and there is commercial and social activity the entirety of the day, though most is focused between 4:00 a.m. until dusk (except on weekends and holidays when it extends to 9:00 -10:00 p.m. due to longer lines). Though the majority of vendors have no set hours, the workday is roughly divided into two shifts: morning (midnight to noon) and afternoon/evening (noon to midnight). I was on location during all hours of both shifts, but spent the bulk of my research time between 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. During this period, I conducted semi-structured interviews and engaged in participant observation, learning people's life stories and everyday details, observations I wrote down in notes and photographed. Part of my participant observation involved filming vendors going about their daily activities with a video camera. The resulting film centers on selling techniques, food preparation, movements around the space, and interactions between vendors and border crossers. I filmed by myself, carrying a camera with an attached microphone to be able to move with relative ease.

During this period my husband and I also opened a *loncheria* in downtown Tijuana where I met and made friends with many people who crossed the border daily. I conducted semi-structured group interviews with seven of them. During these two group interviews, each lasting two to three hours, I asked subjects about their experiences crossing the border—why they crossed, what they did in preparation, what it felt like, etc., questions that prompted further conversation on a variety of topics. I also accompanied three of these subjects on various border-crossing expeditions on foot and recorded the experiences in writing, photographs, and video. The film that came out of my video observations focuses on the border crossing experience of one person, Evelyn, over the course of an expedition

on foot. I should mention I too am a long time border crosser, who during this period crossed the border by car almost weekly to run errands and purchase American goods on the other side.

The films I produced are unscripted and primarily follow internal action and subject cues/movements rather adopt the expository and didactic style of conventional documentary forms. I filmed ‘as things happened,’ editing collected footage to determine what to shoot next. Filming, editing, along with participant observation and interviewing then happened simultaneously, allowing all elements in this process to inform one another, and to understand ‘final’ materials in relation. As a result, the themes, ideas, observations, and reflections found in my writing arose through the process of filmmaking. My focus on movement, waiting, and performance make sense, and are maybe even a little obvious, when thought through film, a medium where motion, rest, space, and time are everything. But these three areas also reflect a more general sense of how people engage environments, as the work of phenomenological geographer David Seamon can attest, where he too focused on the categories of “movement, rest, and encounter” for his *Geography of the Lifeworld* (1979).

This initially open-ended film exploration follows an “observational cinema” framework, a filmmaking practice associated with anthropological film that borrows from *cinéma vérité* and Italian neorealist traditions. ‘Observational’ here doesn’t refer to a detached or ‘objective’ observer, quite the opposite; it is an embodied and relational way of directing attention, of looking. As Grimshaw and Ravetz (2009) explain:

To attend to the world observationally meant to shift attention towards one’s body and to move with and around one’s subjects, allowing one’s body in action or repose to become part of filmic space. Through this reorientation of the body came an increased emphasis on the senses of touch, sight, sound, smell as explicit aspects of

the filmmaking encounter. Working like this depends on not remaining at a distance from one's subjects but instead moving closer to them. Paradoxical though it at first seemed, proceeding in this way required openness, trust, and intimacy with subjects (p. 177).

Within anthropology then my film work can be seen in relation to other observational and sensory-centered films (Castaing-Taylor, 2009; Castaing-Taylor & Paravel, 2012; Grimshaw, 2014; MacDougall, 1972, 2007; MacDougall & MacDougall, 1982), and to the *ethnofiction* of Jean Rouch (1955, 1958, 1967), whose interest in subjectivity and storytelling intentionally blended the boundaries between reality and fiction. These border films also found inspiration in the contemplative and oneiric spirit found in Andrei Tarkovsky (1975), the lyricism of Jean Vigo (1933, 1934), and in Maya Deren's (1944) imaginative engagements with time and space. All of these films engage the poetic and the imaginary through a preoccupation with the opaque and other intangible aspects of life, much like other sensorial and phenomenological approaches to experience do.

Filmmaking as a method addresses the phenomenological and spatial concerns of this study of the border and reflects some of the nature of borders as well. Filmmaking presents a "different way of knowing" (MacDougall, 2006) compared to academic writing, one that is more concerned with experience than with explanation. It reflects the phenomenological pre-reflexive (pre-theoretical) stance of 'being in the world' that maintains a degree of opaqueness, ambiguity, and indeterminacy in the nature of experience.

MacDougall explains, "Before films are a form of representing or communicating, they are a form of looking. [...] In many respects filming, unlike writing, precedes thinking. It registers the process of looking with a certain interest, a certain will" (2006, p. 6-7). Filmmaking then presents a way of examining how we look at things, how we pay attention, and what we pay

attention to. It reveals some of the ways we engage with the world and how we actively shape it through experience. Filming is a way of showing what one sees, but also an attempt to discover what one cannot see (the invisible), a kind of knowledge that can itself only be expressed visually and by showing.

Appearance *is* knowledge, of a kind. Showing becomes a way of saying the unsayable. Visual knowledge (as well as other forms of sensory knowledge) provides one of our primary means of comprehending the experience of other people. Unlike the knowledge communicated by words, what we show in images has no transparency or volition—it is a different knowledge, stubborn and opaque, but with a capacity for the finest detail. (MacDougall, 2006, p. 5-6)

This is one of the difficulties with and the potential of images, they are simultaneously highly specific and general, they are indexical while remaining open to meaning, or put differently, by resisting decoding and insisting on opaqueness. Much like the border, images exceed themselves. But this excess also works in a different way; this form presents its own set of challenges. MacDougall (1998) explains how the filmic image becomes more than reality because it has accrued meaning through representation, through the fixing of reality framed and organized in a particular way. At the same time, the image is always less than reality, because the very nature of fixing and representation is reductive and limited. The argument then is not that the medium of film is better than writing, but that film and writing present distinct ways of understanding and expressing social phenomena, and that the medium of film is particularly adept at exploring and communicating sensory, affective, and embodied aspects of experience. In other words, film is able to articulate a kind of knowledge about the everyday that exists beyond words and our conceptions of it; it has a way of making the invisible visible.

Filmmaking and film also present a way of addressing the phenomenological issues of intersubjectivity and embodiment, geographical concerns around the interrelations that make up the ever-evolving environments we inhabit, and more broadly, questions about how we make and experience places. The capacity of film to represent sensory experience has been discussed, but the kind of filmmaking proposed here is itself a kind of embodied, intersubjective practice. MacDougall again explains the phenomenological relationship between the body, images, and how we make meaning: “Meaning is produced by our whole bodies, not just by conscious thought. We see with our bodies, and any image we make carries the imprint of our bodies; that is to say, of our being as well as the meanings we intend to convey” (2006, p. 3). Thus, “corporeal images are not just the images of other bodies; they are also images of the body behind the camera and its relations with the world” (2006, p. 3). Filmmaking is then “an active process of engagement” (Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2009, p. 135) with the world that involves the co-construction of reality between the people in front of and behind the camera (and eventually, the people viewing the film). Grimshaw and Ravetz (2009) make the case for observational filmmaking as a kind of “skilled practice” (per Ingold), one that “[brings] into focus the relational and experience-rich character of a lifeworld” and “[opens] up a distinctive kind of inter-subjective space in which new anthropological understandings might emerge” (p. 135). This space is created as the filmmaking is taking place and is reflected in the film itself. The time-space within the film is the result of these intersubjective encounters:

The co-presence of filmmaker and subjects, the creation of shared time and space between them (coevalness), serves as the basis for creating a world for the viewer that has its own spatial and temporal coherence [...] Events, relationships, spaces press against [the observational filmmaker], shaping the contours of the work and



affecting the viewer's capacity to imagine or to be lifted beyond the limits of his or her own experience. (Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2009, p.135)

This kind filmmaking practice is thus a relational and participatory endeavor (an intersubjective encounter) between filmmaker, film subjects, and space, a joint doing *in* and *with* the world. MacDougall describes how often during the filmmaking process “the pleasure of filming erodes the boundaries between filmmaker and subject, between the bodies filmmakers see and the images they make” (2006, p. 27). This is what Jean Rouch (2003) experienced as *ciné-trance*, a trance-like state induced by the act of filming, which reflected a level of synchrony between his mind-body-camera and the movements of his (often possessed) subjects that dissolved the border between the two. All synchrony aside, the point here is to highlight the ways the subject and filmmaker become entangled in space during the filmmaking process. Later, when viewing the film, the audience also becomes a part of this encounter as they participate in the exchange that is taking place before their eyes.

Films also offer a distinctive ability to show place. Films “are permeated with the imprint of human environments. Each social landscape is a distinctive sensory complex, constructed not only of material things but also of human activities and the bodies of human beings themselves” (MacDougall, 2006, p. 58). The particular configuration of these and other elements are what lend places their unique character. And a single shot of a landscape, a gesture, an exchange, etc., can convey more of these elements than can be expressed through writing. “In portraying social environments, films often automatically communicate an entire complex of relations that in writing would emerge only as the result of firm intention” (MacDougall, 2006, p.59). This project consciously brings to focus these spatial relations as they take place in *la Linea*, using both writing and film, in attempts to extend the

limits of what we can see and understand about the border and spaces more broadly. If films already carry an ‘imprint’ of the environment in which they are made, what happens when the focus of the film is precisely to explore this environment? The use of film to study space is an area that remains largely undeveloped in anthropology.<sup>35</sup>

### **General Organization**

The chapters included here don’t trace an unfolding argument, but rather examine different, albeit related, aspects of the Line. They are intended to exist in chiasmic relation to one another, presenting distinct, intertwining observations that present a fuller picture when seen together. This holds especially true for film chapters three and five. We are in the habit of seeing images as information, as texts, as being ‘about’ something (MacDougall, 1998, p. 248-249), but I ask that photographs and films be approached on their own terms. While integral to the written chapters, the films are not intended to illustrate them, nor should the written sections be understood as explanation of the films. As mentioned earlier, “images and written texts not only tell us things differently, they tell us different things” (MacDougall, 1998, p. 257). Thus generally speaking, the textual and visual elements of this project are meant to exist in equal relation to one another, not for the visual to be subsumed under the explanatory needs of the textual. That being said, it’s likely that at any given point an element in one might undercut or expand an aspect in the other. Such is the nature of working in-between these mediums.

A quick note on the economy and labor. There is a vast literature on labor and the informal economy in Mexico and Latin America. There are studies on informal labor and its

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<sup>35</sup> Film and visual culture scholars have analyzed the place of space—understood beyond ‘setting’ as ‘landscape’—in film (Gorfinkel & Rhodes, 2011; Harper & Rayner, 2010; Lefebvre, 2006). Geographers too have examined this relationship (Cresswell & Dixon, 2002), increasingly exploring film and video as geographic methodologies not only as objects of analysis (Garrett, 2011; Lorimer, 2010). Ethnographic filmmakers and anthropologists studying space have not been in too much communication, however.

relationship to gender, to the history of labor unions, to the state, as well as studies on street vending in particular, many conducted primarily in Mexico City. Border vendors and some border crossers are part of a cross-border informal economy but this dissertation does not engage this literature.<sup>36</sup> The focus is instead on the experience of labor, or the labor of experience, in a phenomenological sense. Labor as “work” is broadly conceived here, perhaps most aptly defined by way of the field of physics. “Work” in physics is understood as the transference of energy that takes place when something is moved from one place to another. In this way, work is related to the action or force of *revolver* that shapes the kinds of movements that take place at the border. As Merleau-Ponty (1964/ 2007) explained, the working body is one “which is an intertwining of vision and movement” (p. 353). Border vendors and crossers both *do* “work” under this definition, though very different kinds of work, and only one kind is remunerated and therefore understood as labor. With this I don’t mean to simplify reality by playing word games, but rather—following the work of feminist scholars and others—my aim is to complicate our understanding of what “work” is, specifically, by focusing on what it *looks* like and what it *feels* like.

To do so, I will visually present some of the work vendors and crossers do (chapters 3 and 5), practices I will explore more deeply through discussions on the experience of ambulatory vendors’ walking (Chapter 4) and crossers’ waiting (Chapter 6), as well as both groups’ ways of performing (Chapter 7). In the appendices you will also find the life histories of one vendor, Lourdes, and of one crosser, Evelyn. While Lourdes’ and Evelyn’s stories are only two of hundreds of thousands, I hope they will help provide a better sense of the life of *la Línea*.

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<sup>36</sup> While I don’t take this approach, someone else should! Few anthropological studies along the border region and in the city of Tijuana have discussed, much less focused on, informal labor or street vending. See Staudt (1998) in El Paso/Juarez, also McCrossen (2009) and Murià Tuñón (2010) via the study of consumerism and consumption patterns in Tijuana/San Diego).

Chapter 2 “sets the scene” by locating the space of the checkpoint in the broader context of the city of Tijuana and the U.S.-Mexico border. Here I provide a brief history of Tijuana and of the *Mercado de artesanias* (Artisan’s market), explain how vendors are currently organized socially and spatially, as well as offer information on who crosses the border and how.

Chapter 3 is a film focused on border vendors and the market. *Todo lo que uno hace* presents a series of vignettes about the Line, featuring vendors making and selling their goods, and generally going about their day-to-day activities.

Chapter 4 discusses the practice of walking to explore the relationship between vendors and space of the border. Specifically, I examine how ambulatory vendors’ experience of walking around commuting traffic shapes their relationship to the Line and “makes” the space of the border. In focusing on the mobility of vendors rather than that of crossers (who are generally understood to be the most mobile of the two groups), I raise questions about our association between privilege and mobility, and whose mobilities count.

Chapter 5 is a film centered on one border crosser. *Crossing with Evelyn* shows Evelyn and I crossing the border one morning into the U.S. on foot.

Chapter 6 is focused on border crossers and the waiting they do to cross the border to examine the relationship between time and the space of the Line. It provides detailed descriptions of the border crossing experience and presents an analysis of the major aspects of this experience as described by border crossers. Here I discuss the different temporalities at play at the border and study the border crossing experience through the method of “rhythmanalysis” proposed by Lefebvre.

Chapter 7 examines the importance of the visual, the visible, and of appearance in the Line. I discuss the site as a crucial performance space for Tijuana residents (through

protests and art interventions) and for state power through the spectacle of security and surveillance. I also explore the performance in everyday practice of vendors' self-presentation as a sales technique, as well as the ways border crossers prepare for and perform the border crossing ritual.

Finally, I end with some brief concluding thoughts and reflections on my personal relationship to this space.

### **Significance**

Tijuana is a place that has been understood more through the mythologies that surround it than from life lived there. It is a place that was founded on welcoming the foreigner, fashioning itself according to his needs, so long as they were able to pay. It's no wonder that Tijuana continues to be defined, constructed, and appropriated according to a "Black Legend" of vice, sexual deviance, violence, lawlessness, and corruption (Berumen, 2003). Myths have a way of reinforcing themselves especially when one is looking for their living proof. Edward Said has discussed the ways imperialism, colonialism, and culture become implicated spatially, through an "imaginative geography," or "the invention and construction of a geographical space called the Orient, for instance, with scant attention paid to the actuality of the geography and its inhabitants" (2000, p. 8). In this case, the discourse of *Orientalism* became reified through imperialism, and manifested in the geographical place of "the East." Like Orientalism, the Black Legend exaggerates difference and presumes the superiority of white Americans through projections of U.S. cultural anxieties around race, class, and gender. In the other direction, in relation to central and southern Mexico, Tijuana and northern states continue to be perceived as peripheral cultural deserts and sites of

“barbarity.”<sup>37</sup> At the same time, this peripheral region has become a core economic center in Mexico due to the strong transnational ties afforded by its location. The border region is understood as having endless economic development potential and as always being in a state of movement (motion that is promoted as “forward”, “progressive”, or “innovative”). This combination of high demographic and economic growth, rapid transformation, short history (Tijuana is 128 years old), together with its desert geography, entrenches the city’s status as a kind of “non-place” (Auge, 1992/2009) where nothing of substance, like ‘culture,’ can stick or grow. This “imaginative geography” thus offers up the region as empty and malleable space, fertile for capitalist growth.

All of this to say the border region and Tijuana maintain a peculiar peripheral-but-not status on both sides of the border. The U.S.-Mexico border, and specifically the city of Tijuana, have been endlessly defined and redefined by academics, cultural critics, corporations, governments, and the media. As cultural historian Josh Kun and anthropologist Fiamma Montezemolo remark, “Tijuana is much talked about, but little heard” (2012). Drug cartel violence, sex trafficking, police and government corruption, violence against women and *feminicidios* (murders targeting women), rampant drug, alcohol, and gambling addiction, high rates of poverty, homelessness, petty-theft, together with socioeconomic insecurity and inequality are the bread and butter of Tijuana. Just this year, the Secretary of Public Safety in Baja California reported a total of 452 murders from January to April; up from 265 during the same period last year, in 2016. And 2016 had been

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<sup>37</sup> During the time of the Aztec (Mexica) Empire, the nomadic indigenous groups not under Mexica rule who inhabited the north were understood to be “barbarians,” uncivilized hunter-gatherers from an inhospitable land, a designation that continued into colonial rule. Nowadays, the North is seen as being too far from the cultural mecca that is central Mexico, and too close to the United States to be considered “authentically” Mexican. A visit to the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City will reveal a large map of ‘the peoples of Mexico’ that begins to fade into nothingness as it reaches the northern states, the Baja California peninsula entirely absent. Drug violence, desert geography, and this sociocultural position continue to shape an imaginary of the North as a barbaric and desertic land. After all, the border is the limit, the frontier where the ‘marginal’ reside.

a shock, recording the highest number of homicides since 2008—the bloodiest year in recent history, part of a period when gruesome and public acts of violence decimated social life in the city.<sup>38</sup> With these numbers, Tijuana is again leading as the city in Mexico with the highest murder rate. There’s no denying life in Tijuana includes these and other harrowing realities. They exist side by side with the mythologies of this place. The city, the myth, the border, the image, are all more than, and less than, the lived reality of this place. This excess is what carries the potential for opacity and openness. Tijuana then, like the border, can never be fixed or reduced to any one perspective or knowledge of the city. Attempting to do so would be foolhardy and a waste of time.

This project then is also located in-between these mythical visions and lived reality of Tijuana, on the ambiguous line between the real and the imagined. If “our sense of place involves both the perception of a preconfigured space, with its own existential coherence, and our culturally and experientially determined interpretations of it” (MacDougall, 2006, p. 59), then by showing something different of Tijuana, and sharing the everyday—even banal—experience of its inhabitants I’m attempting to shape outsiders’ “sense of place,” to open up this sense of the city to complexity and contradiction, and draw attention to the imagination and topography of power. Showing the experience of others so we may understand something of their lives seems especially relevant in the current political climate of the U.S and Mexico. Oxford Dictionary’s “Word of the Year” was *post-truth*, defined as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief” (2016). After truth, then, we are

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<sup>38</sup> Other types of crime such as extortion and kidnapping remain low compared with this previous period. The rise in homicides is again linked to turf wars among competing drug cartels, but murders now seem to be happening between low-ranking street drug dealers rather than between those higher in the command chain. Still, these killings are more regularly taking place in public, high transit spaces. Combined with rising drug addiction and demand, and an ineffective local government, Tijuana residents worry things will only get worse.

left with hate, lies, and fear—precisely the kind of ‘truth’ we need to leave behind. It seems to me that one way to counter this tendency is by insisting on a shared coeval reality, one that recognizes difference but reduces the distance between self and other through identification. Film facilitates this kind of immediacy, going beyond empathy so we don’t only *know* another’s experience, but *live* a part of it with them.

This work contributes to the field of border studies in its proposal of a different understanding of the notion of border. The use of film will be of interest to phenomenological anthropologists interested in different ways of examining and expressing sensory and embodied experience. The exploration of space through film should also be of interests to anthropologists, geographers, and other scholars interested in space and place and how people live and make meaning in/with the environment. Those interested in ethnographic form and critical approaches to anthropology might also find this project useful. And of course, anyone interested in Tijuana and the borderlands will hopefully find something of value here as well.



## Chapter 2

### Setting the Scene

The city of Tijuana in the state of Baja California has seen many transformations in its brief 128 year-old history. Continually characterized by growth, Tijuana experienced its first population and economic boom in the 1920s, during the United States Prohibition era. The construction of the Agua Caliente Casino and the presence of brothels and bars made Tijuana a prime destination for American tourists. This “vice industry” was so lucrative that it protected the local economy from the Great Depression (Taylor, 2002). The modern U.S. border control apparatus characterized by physical checkpoints and immigration control emerged during this time, in attempts to regulate morality and the ongoing flow of “vices”, as well as restrict Mexican immigration during the Great Depression (St. John, 2011). The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) agency was founded in 1933 and was charged with dealing with immigration matters and border regulation.

World War II again brought an increase in population, as the American guest worker *bracero* program drew people to the northern border from central and southern Mexico, to fill agricultural labor shortages in California. In the 1950s, the first fence between both countries was raised, made out of chain link. With the end of the *bracero* program and a large migrant population remaining in the North, the Mexican government instated the Programa Nacional Fronterizo (Pronaf—National Border Program) in 1961 to promote industrial growth in northern border cities, initiating the first round of *maquiladoras* and modernization (Dillman, 1970; Fernandez-Kelly, 1983). Together with other northern Mexican border cities, Tijuana experienced another rise in foreign investment and economic growth prompted by the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994.

This same year, “Operation Gatekeeper” was put in place along the Tijuana/San Diego region (similar measures, “Operation Safeguard” in Ambos Nogales and “Operation Hold the Line,” previously “Operation Blockade,” in El Paso/Ciudad Juarez were instituted in 1993 and 1994). These measures doubled INS funding, the number of Border Patrol agents, and the amount of physical barriers and technology along these metropolitan areas effectively militarizing the border to a degree never seen before. The recession experienced soon after the devaluation of the Mexican peso in 1994-1995 led to increased Mexican migration. Since these Operations, undocumented migrants are forced to traverse rural desert and mountainous regions along the border, which has resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of migrants.

After the September 11 attacks in 2001, the Department of Homeland Security was created. In 2003, the INS was reconfigured into three separate agencies: Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and Customs and Border Protection (CBP). This initiated a second wave of border militarization, with an influx of sophisticated surveillance and monitoring technologies along the border. The Secure Fence Act of 2006 further increased spending on the border to build a second (and in places a third) 700-mile long wall between the U.S. and Mexico equipped with lighting and infrared cameras, and increased the use of satellite and drone surveillance. About 650 miles of the fence were completed, in part due to topographical limitations. Between Tijuana and San Diego there are currently three border fences.

In 2007, the global financial crisis, accompanied by an intensification of drug-related violence, slowed Tijuana’s economy, an effect made worse by foreign capital relocation to other parts of the world. Despite this, the city of Tijuana has continued with historic population growth (Anderson & Gerber, 2008). The 2010 the Mexican census calculated a

population of close to two million in Tijuana, a number assumed to be higher as this measure does not take into account more transient groups. In the last few years, changing perceptions about city safety together with the ever-rising cost of living in San Diego (average rent across the county surpasses \$1,000 USD) has prompted many Mexican, Mexican-American, and other American residents to move south (\$1,000 USD in Tijuana can be stretched to pay rent and many other expenses, providing a very comfortable living for a household of one or two). Baja California has long been a retirement haven for Americans, but the recent movements south have included entire families and individuals still in the labor force, who now have to cross the border to go to work. This high influx of dollar-earners has led to an ongoing kind of cross-border gentrification, dramatically impacting the Tijuana housing market. Houses and property are being sold, studios and condos are being developed, and rent is skyrocketing (not to mention increasingly being demanded in dollars, not pesos) in both traditionally rich and poor neighborhoods sitting close to the border—the city's semi-concentric core. With a volatile and expensive exchange rate, high dollar rents are pushing peso-earners, who conform the majority of residents, to peripheral and poorer neighborhoods around the city.

Additionally, since 2008 the number of deportations of Mexican citizens from the U.S. has skyrocketed. According to the Mexican Secretary of Government, close to 40,000 people, the majority of whom were men over 18 years of age, were repatriated to Mexico via Tijuana in 2016 alone. Some researchers place this number higher, at more than 90,000, with an average of 250 people deported daily to Tijuana (Hernandez, 2015). The majority has spent most of their lives living in the U.S., some speaking little Spanish. According to local municipal authorities, around 90% of deportees stay in the city, and three out of ten end up living on the street, as all levels of government have failed to provide adequate services and

support to integrate this new population. For example, obtaining a Mexican identification—necessary for lawful employment—is almost impossible for arriving deportees who have to wade through complicated bureaucratic procedures to obtain copies of birth certificates and/or other documents. Many independent and some state sponsored shelters and organizations have risen to aid this population, but many newcomers have fragile or no support networks in Mexico or in the U.S., and eventually end up moneyless, jobless, and turn to drugs and crime. To make matters more complicated, in the last few years the city has also seen a high influx of migrant men, women, and children, arriving to seek asylum in the U.S. Many are Mexican, fleeing violence in southern Mexico (from May to October of 2016, around 8,000 people arrived, the majority women), but there is also a growing number of Central American, Haitian, African, and other foreign migrants (around 7,000 people total arrived during the same period. 5,000 of them Haitian).<sup>1</sup> As a result, the city is increasingly full of displaced people with few options and resources, people who are stuck in a different kind of between. Tijuana, like other cities around the world, finds itself improvising in dealing with an evolving and growing migratory humanitarian crisis.

### **CBP and *La Línea***

The San Ysidro Port of Entry, as it is called by U.S. Customs and Border Protection, has been a key site for the implementation of new border surveillance technology, reflecting an ever-growing state concern for “national security” in a post-9/11 era (Donnan & Wilson 2010; Pallitro & Heyman 2008). The heightened security since 9/11 has led to unprecedented waiting times, changing commuter traffic and everyday vending activity at this checkpoint.

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<sup>1</sup> Figures obtained in conversation with Lic. Rosario Lozada Romero, director of the newly formed municipal department of Dirección de Atención al Migrante, or Office for Migrant Services, in 2016.

San Ysidro’s extraordinary traffic has made it a major testing ground for new “smart border” technologies and protocols such as gamma-imaging systems, biometric and radio frequency identification pedestrian kiosks, and “Trusted Traveler” ID programs to be used in other ports of entry. These monitoring tools control, classify, restrict, and shape the movement of people and things into the U.S., attesting to the embodied experience of an increasingly militarized border with Mexico. These changes in building design and infrastructure dictate how the space is to be used, defining the border as a military ground of exclusion and selective inclusion. As the CBP agency “ethos” states, “We are America’s frontline.”<sup>2</sup> In these terms, everything outside of country is defined as enemy territory; *la Línea* is where CBP works to keep such enemies out.

Currently, a bi-national \$741 million<sup>3</sup> three-phase checkpoint renovation to be completed by 2019 is underway—the San Ysidro Land Port of Entry Expansion Project. This expansion has replaced the existing building structure constructed in the 1970s. It boasts U.S. Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) platinum certification (the highest of its kind) and the goal of net zero energy, as well as upgraded surveillance technology. This will make it the first—and busiest—border checkpoint in the world, and the first building in the U.S. that is open 24/7 with such certification.

The environmentally friendly design is most lauded aspect of this project in the press. The few surveillance features that are mentioned are embedded in descriptions of

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<sup>2</sup> The U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency “ethos”: “Our shared identity, beliefs and aspirations...We are the guardians of our Nation's borders. We are America's frontline. We safeguard the American homeland at and beyond our borders. We protect the American people against terrorists and the instruments of terror. We steadfastly enforce the laws of the United States while fostering our Nation's economic security through lawful international trade and travel. We serve the American people with vigilance, integrity, and professionalism.”

<sup>3</sup> Miller Hull, the architecture firm behind the project, provides \$577 million as the figure. I’ve seen different versions in both the 500 millions and 700 millions.

sustainable design. The Miller Hull Partnership (2016), the architecture firm behind the design, describes some of them:

Four 100-foot iconic masts will extend from a 780-foot “pillow” canopy that covers lanes of traffic going into the United States. These masts will include security cameras and lighting and will pump fresh air into the inspection booths below the canopy. The canopy here, as well as the one covering the second inspection facility, is composed of ETFE, or Ethylene Tetrafluoroethylene [...] This material allows for rain and sun protection for the officers in booths, and because of its translucent nature allows for natural light thereby requiring no artificial lighting during the day. The design reasoning behind the use of the canopies was also for security: the canopy’s thin nature provides unimpeded views to cars queuing at the border.

The ‘soft’ canopy protects CBP officers against the desert sun and provides natural lighting all the while being thin enough to allow monitoring from above. In an interview for *Urban Land Magazine*, Craig Curtis, one of the firm partners, elaborates on the use of the 100-foot masts. These masts “...will welcome residents and visitors into the United States. The land port is the first thing that millions of people will see as they enter our country, and we want to make a good impression,” he adds. [...] Some have even likened the masts to the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, which welcomed generations of newcomers from Europe” (Myers, 2013). These tall masts decked with lights and cameras, combined with a low transparent canopy, are designed to provide CBP with a 360-degree line of sight. But the emphasis is framed around the ways the design helps reduce the carbon footprint and presents a “welcoming” image, despite all experience on the ground indicating the contrary (as we will see in Chapter 6). This discursive and applied integration of green and surveillance technology obfuscates and distracts from the human experience, especially of the humans

being processed. This architectural form was therefore not designed to suit the needs of those who use it the most, but rather, in accordance to the needs of the state. Miller Hull's claim that this new checkpoint is "the port of the future" is all the more foreboding.

The renovation project also promises to ease traffic congestion and reduce waiting times for border crossers by increasing the vehicle lanes from 24 to 34, double stacking the processing booths to create 64, and constructing a new pedestrian building. Cindy Gomper-Graves of the South County Economic Development Council states, "The land port is the largest and most important part of San Diego's economy, bar none [...] Speeding up the crossing process would be a boon for the entire region." In reference to the double booths, she said, "It's sort of like a Target or Walmart store, where you see the company installing a counter behind an existing counter to expedite service [...] Now that idea is coming to San Ysidro" (Myers, 2013). While border crossers revel in the idea of shorter wait times, the drive to improve usability is guided by an economic imperative (boosting San Diego's economy), not by concerns for the well-being of those providing the labor and resources to further said economy. The comparison between the border checkpoint and American big-box retail stores makes clear the vision of the Linea as both a site for state surveillance and control, as well as for the accumulation of capital.

The new booths and lanes were finished in late 2014 and the new pedestrian building, "Ped West," was inaugurated in August 2016. In September 2014, wait times dropped dramatically when 24 new lanes were opened with 46 double booths. The lack of line depressed commercial activity for border vendors, but made commuters very happy. This only lasted a month, however, and since then 24 single vehicle lanes are in operation and lines are the longest they have been since 2007. The San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG, 2016) reported increased vehicle crossings from 2013 to 2015 by

27 percent. I should say that increased traffic does not always mean increased earnings for vendors as sales—especially of higher-priced souvenirs—depend on the kind of person crossing the border. Commuters (who conform the largest percentage of crossers) do not generally make purchases at the border and when they do it is usually of food, a lower cost item. Still, no line means zero sales for all. In addition to increased traffic, CBP has been suffering a staffing shortage and high attrition rates due to overwork, with only 85.7% of officer positions filled at the San Ysidro checkpoint in fiscal year 2016 (Dibble, 2016). It is unclear how this will unfold as the renovation project is expected to come to an end in 2019.



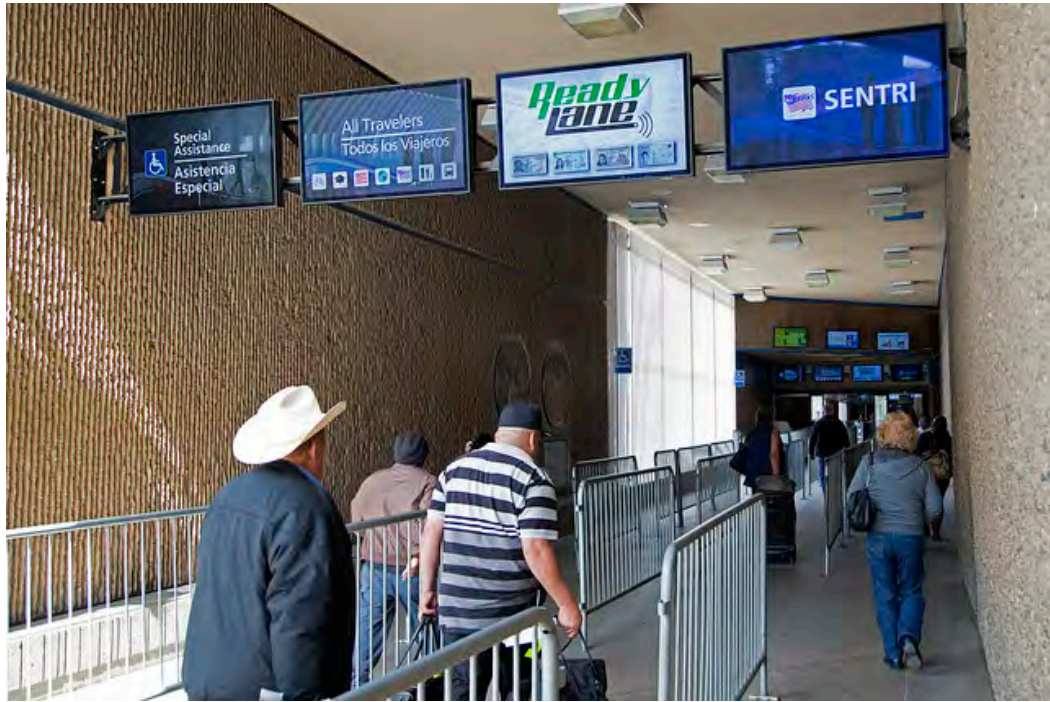


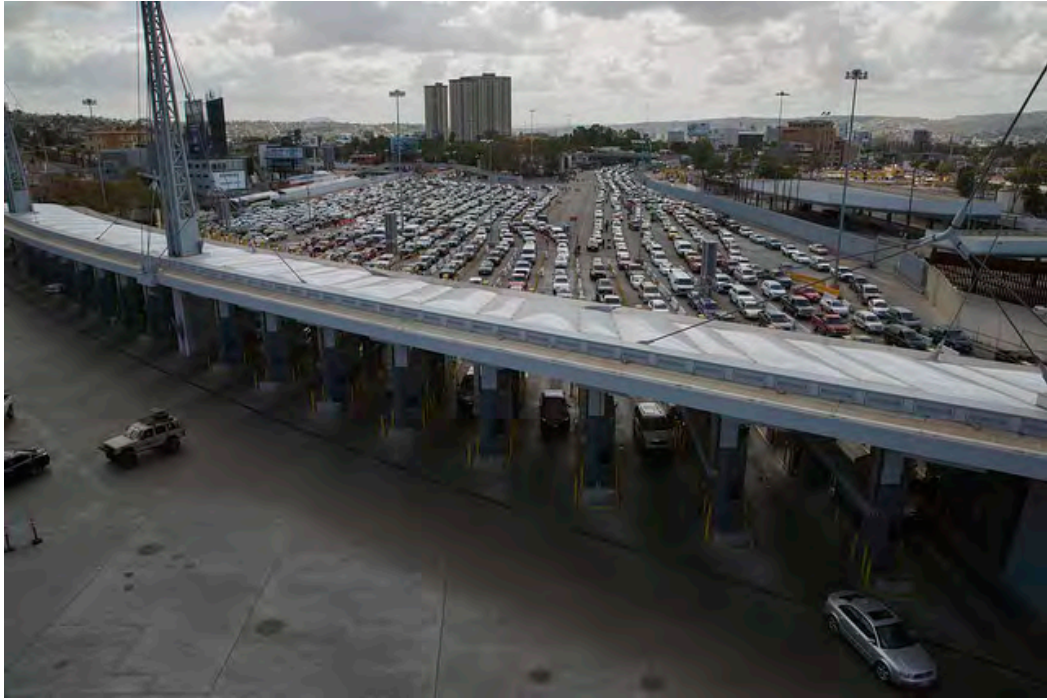


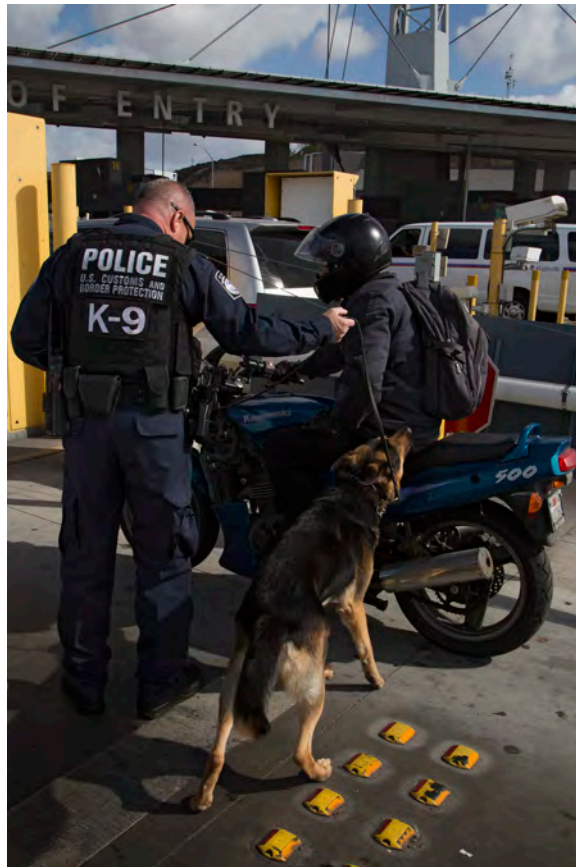
Images from Miller Hull Partnership (2016)



Photographs by Josh Denmark from U.S. Customs and Border Protection's Flickr Page (CBP, 2012).







Photographs by Donna Burton from U.S. Customs and Border Protection's Flickr Page (CBP, 2016)

### **A Brief History of the *Mercado de Artesanías***

The *Mercado de Artesanías* (Artisans Market) is located in between the border checkpoint lanes of traffic. Most vendors working at the border are based out of this sprawling market, where many have worked for generations. Before the *Mercado* that we see today was built, vendors sold curio souvenirs out of their cars parked on the side of the road. It was the 1950s. The roads were not paved, there were maybe a hundred vendors, and only what are now “General Traffic” lanes to the west of the market were in operation. In the 1960s, vendors organized to obtain permits from the city.<sup>4</sup> The *Puerta Mexico* bridge that both welcomed and said goodbye to travelers in Tijuana was constructed in this decade as well (it was demolished in 2015). The 1970s saw an apogee of curio sales, as well as the construction of the previous U.S. Port of Entry that opened with twenty-six new lanes for traffic. Between 1986-1987, vendors built the market that stands to this day over land they had purchased from the federal government. In the early 1980s, there were around 500 people selling souvenirs at the border. Based on internal union calculations, there are currently more than 1,500 vendors.

Artisan crafts from the state of Jalisco—vases, cups, figurines, —as well as local Tijuana crafts—planters and piggy banks, —among many others, were profitably sold during these decades and continue to be sold to this day. In 2001, however, heightened security after 9/11 led to unprecedented long waiting times to cross the border. A few years later, beginning in 2007, the escalation of drug trafficking violence in the region ensured the ongoing surge in surveillance and monitoring technologies that continue to create long wait

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<sup>4</sup> Initially part of the *Unión de Yeso y Plástico* (Plaster and Plastic Union), they would soon join the national labor unions of *Confederación de Trabajadores de México* (Confederation of Mexican Workers, CTM) and the *Confederación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos* (Revolutionary Confederation of Workers and Farmers, CROC). In the early 90s, some ambulatory vendors would begin to splinter off of these larger unions, in order to obtain permits of their own and not be beholden to what they considered to be authoritarian union leadership. They would eventually form six separate *agrupaciones* (groups).

times at the border. These events, combined with the Great Recession in the U.S. during this same period, resulted in a decline of tourism, disposable income, and sales at the border.

Since 2001 in particular, sales have steadily plummeted and commercial activity forever changed as vendors adapted to meet the new demands of a northbound traffic also under transformation. Whereas before vendors greatly profited from selling souvenirs to white American tourists, the majority of crossers are now other Tijuana residents on their way to work, or saving their money for purchases on the other side. *Burritos, tostilocos*, and other food items replaced ponchos and ceramic wares as the most sold goods. Carts selling refreshments emerged between the lines of waiting cars and the once bustling curio market is now a series of closed stalls used for storage for the wares sold on foot.

Most recently, the “San Ysidro Land Port of Entry Expansion Project” that promised to reduce wait times for border crossers and threaten vendor livelihood poses other problems as it is implemented by the Mexican government. On the Mexican side, this project included the demolition of the historic *Puerta Mexico* and its immediate surroundings, adjacent to the *Mercado*. The “Expansion Project” already disrupted traffic flows but jeopardizes vendor livelihood as the final phases on the Tijuana side include the demolition of the Market. There is a lack of communication between the local government, union leaders, Market owners and other vendors. This lack of clarity, distrust, and competing interests among vendors does not bode well for the future of the *Mercado*. Commercial activity at the border has existed since a U.S. checkpoint was established in the 1920s and 1930s. While some form of commerce will likely continue in *la Línea*, the fate of the *Mercado* and the people who own and work it, is uncertain.

## Vendors

According to Mexico's National Institute of Statistics and Geography, in 2016, over 57% of Mexico's working population operated informally, above Latin America's 50% average (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, Inegi, 2016). In the state of Baja California, informal labor was reported at 40% in 2016 (Inegi, 2016).<sup>5</sup> Tijuana is the largest city in the state and together with the neighboring capital of Mexicali both cities comprise the largest percentage of the state's formal and informal workforce. From this we can assume informal labor in Tijuana is also at least at 40%, but more likely closer to the national percentage. The majority of people working at the Linea fall under this category. They are self-employed or employed by another who is self-employed, without job security or benefits, and many are without a stable source of income.

Minimum wage in Mexico in 2016 was 73 MXN a day (4 USD), with half of workers in Baja California actually making between one to three times the minimum, or 73-219 MXN (4-12 USD) daily. Formal jobs in Mexico include health insurance and often other benefits. Baja California has long been one of the country's richest states, and reported one of the highest levels of employment in the country in the last two years, but inflation has also risen. At 7.28% in the beginning of 2017, Tijuana ranks third as the city with the highest inflation in the country. That is to say, the cost of living in Tijuana is quickly rising and surpassing incomes, with the basket of goods and services (*canasta básica*) now higher than the 6,800 MXN (377 USD) per month it was in 2016. At this rate, a person needs to make at least four times the minimum wage to afford living in Tijuana. Most people don't. Most people don't live in Tijuana, they survive it.

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<sup>5</sup> This number is down from close to 58% in 2014, prompting some to question the accuracy of the latest measurement.



On their part, ambulatory vendors selling souvenirs can make 50-100 USD or more over a two-three day period. Because weekends and holidays are the highest grossing days, this means some vendors earn around 100 USD a week. They usually deal and earn exclusively in dollars, the more profitable and stable currency. However, because they work independently or “on commission,” if they are not able to sell for any reason, or if no one buys what they are selling, they make no money. Their income therefore fluctuates the most. Souvenir ambulatory vendors work any number of hours, anywhere from one to twelve hours a day. Longer workdays are associated with more down time spent socializing with other vendors. Cart workers, associated ambulatory vendors, and other hired hands, can make around 500 MXN daily, or 3,000 MXN weekly—currently around 28 USD and 166 USD, respectively—though many make less. These earnings are for roughly twelve hours of work per day, six days a week. One vendor arrives to work at 1:00 a.m., runs around selling burritos until around 9:00 a.m. and spends the next three to four hours cleaning, accounting, and setting up for the next day before returning home. Though there is always down time, this shift makes for a difficult and tiresome workweek. Young men usually work these positions. People selling goods independently or begging can make 200-300 MXN (11-16 USD) per day. Increasingly so, vendor earnings vary a great deal from person to person and from day to day.

The rest of this section will describe the different kinds of work vendors do at the border and the relationships between them. I will conclude this chapter with information about the reasons border crossers report crossing the border and the documents they are required to hold to do so.

## Ambulatory Vendors

The most visible are ambulatory vendors and cart workers because their operations are in the middle of northbound traffic. Some ambulatory vendors carry souvenirs and other goods (such as clothing, hats, blankets) on themselves, walking in between cars to display the products. Souvenir and goods vendors usually work in the afternoons and evenings rather than in the morning, the rationale being that morning traffic is commuter traffic. There are also ambulatory vendors who sell car insurance, food, or “corporate” goods. I call corporate goods items sold by large businesses not native to but that have set shop at the Linea, items such as coffee from “D’volada” (Tijuana’s version of Starbucks), frozen yogurt from the chain “Yogüs”, as well as medicine from a pharmacy. Food vendors are present all day, selling food primarily between 4:00 a.m until a little after dusk, though in some instances into the night (*churros*, for example). Those selling car insurance or “corporate” goods are generally present during regular business hours. Everyone carries signs or labeled aprons displaying what they sell. Car insurance salesmen are dressed in the company’s uniform and carry signs with prices. They walk around in the mornings and afternoons looking for cars with Mexican license plates to ask if they need insurance. Vendors who sell food usually have the types of food listed in their aprons and often have the logo or the name of the stand for whom they are working. This is similar to those who sell “corporate” goods.

The majority of ambulatory vendors are directly or indirectly tied to a shop or a cart. Most of those selling souvenirs are working for a shop or through a shop. They are predominantly adult men between the ages of 30 to 60. They purchase their goods from shop owners or managers at a reduced cost and then resell the item to crossers at whatever price they choose. It works like this: they collect items from a shop according to their predilection (people specialize or prefer to sell one thing or another). The shop owner or

manager writes these items down. If they make a sale, the vendors will pay the shop for the item. Often, interested buyers want a different size or color or type of item leading the vendor to run back to their shop or other shops or yell out to other vendors in search of the item. Those selling car insurance, food, or corporate goods are employed by the shop or cart owner. These vendors are also predominantly male, but tend to be younger, 15 to 30 years of age. Many women of all ages, however, work as food vendors in the early morning/dawn. These ambulatory vendors walk around advertising their goods and services and take orders from buyers. They later run (and it's usually run) to the shop or cart to acquire the item, or documentation in the case of insurance, to later return with the item and receive payment. On the weekends when there is more traffic, individual and unaffiliated vendors appear selling windshield wipers, dashboard dolls, craft pens, foam jigsaw maps of the U.S. and Mexico, even live puppies, et cetera.

### **Cart Workers**

There are around 70 carts that station themselves along the length of the lanes and border traffic. Carts sell various items, primarily food. Tamales, burritos, oatmeal, and juice-*licuados* carts are out in the morning selling these breakfast foods. Those selling fruit bowls, specialty drinks, snacks and candy, seafood cocktails, churros, as well as cell phone cases and chargers, arrive in the afternoon. Some carts are part of a "fleet"; a permit owner might have two or more carts selling the same thing, but most are individual carts.

Unions regulate which carts are out at what time of day.<sup>6</sup> The rule is that carts can only work either the morning or the evening shift, so only around 35 carts are allowed to be out at any given time. Sometimes though, carts are worked the whole day. People are warned not to do this, but it usually is tacitly allowed unless business has been particularly slow. Cart

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<sup>6</sup> The CTM controls 'from the bridge down,' while the CROC controls the space 'from the bridge up.'

vendors stand by their cart and usually have one other person by their side that walks around the nearby area offering their food to drivers. The runner collects orders and money and delivers the product, while the other vendor prepares the food.

Cart merchants were once souvenir vendors. With the change in traffic brought about by increased security after 9/11, people started looking to sell other goods. Food and drink was a natural choice as crossers went from waiting in line 30 minutes to 4-6 hours. Vendors moved from market stalls to carts in-between traffic, selling nourishment instead of things.

### *Locales y locatarios*

Shopkeepers own, rent, or manage shops (*locales*). Shop owners are called *locatarios*, many of whom no longer work on the premises, but rather rent out their shop space to others or have hired shop “managers.” Currently, shops have one of five different functions and operation. The first is storage. Most shops now function as storage facilities because business has slowed considerably in the last few decades. They hold souvenir goods or supplies for many of the food carts. Some vendors use shops as spaces where they prepare the food that will be sold in carts.

The second function is a souvenir shop. This was the original intended use of these spaces. As a “*Mercado de Artesanias*” the market sold Mexican craft souvenirs to American tourists. Piggy banks, paintings, ponchos, vases, hats, and now, blankets with American football or basketball logos and religious memorabilia are now sold primarily to other Mexicans. There are usually one or two people who stay in the shop managing the sales of the ambulatory vendors who work for these shops. Every shop is permitted to have one person hawking goods within a few meters in front of the shop, anyone extra is required to hold a vendors permit. This is a rule that only the shops that face and have direct access to

the car traffic can take advantage of. Vendors managing or working *at* shops work on commission rather than buying and reselling goods.

There are usually anywhere between three to five ambulatory vendors associated with each shop. This is a group that is always in flux. They might have disagreements with shop managers and leave or get fired, if business is slow, only a few people would be allowed to work at a given time, or they simply might not show up for work. Vendors are required to have the appropriate vending permit, one designated for souvenir sales, but often they work with counterfeit permits or without a permit. This is against union and city rules but almost everyone bends them to improve their chances of making money.

The third use of shops is as a kind of office headquarters. There are three companies that sell temporary American car insurance to drivers with cars registered in Mexico. Most drivers in Mexico do not have car insurance because it is not required to operate a vehicle. California requires car insurance so many drivers crossing the border buy one-day, one-week, or monthly insurance in case they are ever pulled over or get into an accident in the U.S. Insurance vendors walk around the lanes of traffic advertising their product, but are based out of shops used as offices or employee rest areas. There is also a real estate company that sells property in Baja California in the same fashion.

Shops are also used as *loncherias* (small restaurants), selling food to the workers in the market. These are run by women and have changing daily menus or *comidas del día*. These home cooked meals to be eaten sitting at a table, not packaged to be consumed on the go. Though many offer delivery services as well—generally shop managers who are unable to leave their post order their meal, then someone walks it over. The *loncherias* are located inside the Market and are not visible from border crossers' view. There are also other food shops facing vehicular traffic that operate more as stands or carts. Like carts, these food shops also

hire ambulatory vendors. While they too sell food to other vendors, their main aim is to sell food to border crossers. Shops facing outside sell to the outside, to crossers, while those facing inside cater to the inside, to vendors.

A few shops are not independent or family-owned such as a frozen yogurt store and a pharmacy. They are different from other business because of the goods they sell and because more money has been invested in them—they have expensive, sleek signs and things like display cases and coolers. They sell their products primarily to border crossers, hiring ambulatory workers. More recently, the stickers shop opened up. A single man who designs and prints custom stickers and signs runs it. He sells to both border crossers, but has also started selling to vendors, printing canvasses and t-shirts for the *Mercado* soccer teams or the famous *Linea* teenage boxer, and designing shop and cart business logos.

There are two bathroom areas that are well advertised to the car lanes and charge drivers for restroom use. Some souvenir shops facing out are also open 24 hours. These shops are so small goods have to be put on display on the sidewalk or street. At the end of the night, these objects have nowhere to go except to stay where they are. So someone stays the night to keep them company. There are *veladores*, or night watchmen, who guard specific shops overnight. Some of the shops also operate as sleeping areas; some workers are allowed to sleep in the shops in exchange for work. There are also other vendors who sleep in the *Mercado* hallways or roof overnight.

### **Wanderers**

Another set of ambulatory vendors is a group that I call “wanderers,” people who are not formally integrated into the commercial or social structure of the *Mercado*. This group includes people selling services, such as trash collecting and window cleaning, others selling puppies out of backpacks, senior women selling candy from hand-carried baskets or begging,

and others who attempt to sell stolen goods such as phones or odd objects to vendors. Other unlicensed ambulatory sellers could also fit under this category. When *Reglamento* (municipal functionaries) or the police patrol the area, they go after all unlicensed men, especially if they appear to be vagrants or drug-addicts.

Trash collectors walk around the lanes of cars with plastic bags asking *basura?* (trash?), receiving a few pesos in exchange for their services. Window washers keep their distance, staying close to the end of the line, sometimes directing traffic by letting the new arrivals know which lane has been going the fastest. Veteran and established vendors do not like window washers because according to them they make a bad “first impression” of vending activity. Most window washers are homeless young men with substance abuse problems. A hit of crystal meth or heroine costs around 50 MXN (3 USD). Washing windows and cleaning dirt and dust off cars for spare change can quickly add up to the cost of one dose or more. Window washers stay at a distance—at the beginning of a long line of traffic—to avoid conflict with vendors and to be able to quickly escape if the police come after them.

In the past couple of years, I have noticed an increasing number of people walking around with plastic bags full of odd goods attempting to sell these not to commuters, but to workers at the border. Old sport trophies, smartphones, shoes, jeans, etc. They are usually entrepreneurial vagrants, people who call the *Bordo*<sup>7</sup> or the *Zona Norte* (red light district) home.

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<sup>7</sup> “El Bordo” refers to the Tijuana River’s cement canal where around 2,000 people resided under inhumane conditions. A majority of these residents were *deportados*, Mexican migrants who were recently deported back to Mexico after a lifetime in the U.S. This groups’ growing presence plays a part in the story of the *Línea*, as many of them made their way to the *Mercado* seeking work, with varying degrees of success. In March of 2015, after a powerful storm that flooded the site, municipal authorities instituted a “cleaning” campaign, violently removing all *Bordo* dwellers for the last time. People now seek refuge and get high in the city center and on the sides of major roads.

### *Discapacitados*

*Discapacitados*, or handicapped, with city licenses are permitted to ask for alms. Not all *discapacitados* have licenses, but they are generally allowed to stay. Some stand asking for money, others sell candy and snacks, while others collect trash in exchange for a few coins. If their disability requires them to have assistance for moving around and collecting money, a family member or a paid assistant will accompany them. This group places themselves the farthest north, closest to the checkpoint booths, right before the international border marker, though sometimes even past it, 'in' the U.S. They then may do rounds moving south along the lanes before returning to their resting area.

### **Indigenous Women and Children or, “Las Marias”**

There is a group of roughly forty *mixteco* Oaxacan women plus many children who work at the border selling bracelets, begging, and juggling. They are known by other vendors and by commuters as the “*Marias*.” The name is rooted in the fictional character “*la india María*” (Maria, the Indian) portrayed by the actress María Elena Velasco in a series of Mexican popular comedy films and a TV series from the 1970s and 1980s. *La india María* was characterized as noble, honest, and ingenious, making the most out of her poverty in her new city life (she migrated from the rural “campo”), often by pointing out government corruption, racism, classism in Mexican society. In the case of the border, “*María*” is used as a short hand for indigenous woman. Most mestizo vendors resent the federal protections afforded to this indigenous population that do not require them to carry permits, preventing any police or *Reglamento* harassment.

Older women walk around with paper cups in their hands, and younger women walk around with babies asking for change. The children, between five and eleven, work independently in pairs; the younger child stands on the shoulders of the older child and



dispiritedly juggles for a few seconds before going around to ask for money. When they are not working you can find the children playing computer games or using Facebook inside the *Mercado*. Police and *Reglamento* do not harass them so they more or less have free range over the space. According to one mestizo vendor, “*Ellas son las verdaderas ricas de la Linea*,” (They are the true rich of the border), a belief held by others as well. Indigenous women and the disabled are the groups that allegedly collect the most money consistently. Other vendors claim they have seen some of the younger indigenous women driving across the border in expensive SUVs. These women are also often accused of various forms of child abuse.

Indigenous women and children maintain an insular and protective community; mestizos and the indigenous women in fact rarely interact. Mestizo vendors generally ignore the women because they are not believed to pose an economic threat, but there is much *chisme* (gossip) about them and are one of the groups receiving the most severe social scrutiny. Old nationalist tropes prevail, indigenous women here are perceived to be relics of Mexico’s past and a testament to how much more “modern” everyone else is.

### **The Police and *Reglamento***

These are the authorities of the space, but they are not always there as they work in shifts, and local politics determines their level of involvement, especially in the case of *Reglamento*. The police in Tijuana are assigned to work in specific “zones” in the city. The Linea is one of the zones. There are 40 officers assigned to this area and 20 or so work at a time, depending how much space needs to be covered. When the lines are shorter, for example, less officers work. According to one of the officers, the border zone is one of the most coveted in the city because the police work is light and there are a lot of perks. The police are in charge of “maintaining order,” meaning they are primarily responsible for making sure cars don’t cut in line and drivers don’t get into fights. The most demanding part

of their job is kicking out ambulatory vendors without permits and some of the wanderers. Often this involves *levantar* -ing (lifting, pick up), or taking workers to jail for 36 hours and charging them a fine they won't be able to pay. Once they're out, people return, with a few days of lost work and possibly missing merchandise. One of the stated reasons for police presence is to keep the area "safe" as there have been accusations of window washers, or some of the poorer wanderers, stealing from commuters as they wait in their car. The story is the Linea needs to be kept safe for tourists, so they don't fear returning to spend money in Mexico.

Some of the perks for working at the Linea are access to American goods and the ability to make extra money through bribes. Mexican police officers interact with CBP officers daily, and sometimes CBP officers sell their extra police gear such as leather holsters to the Mexican police for a 'good price'. Or if the police establish relationships with commuters, they may request some help in purchasing goods on the other side, such as uniforms. Police officers in Tijuana are required to purchase most of their equipment out of pocket, and since many of them don't have visas to enter the U.S. where they could acquire better quality police gear for cheap, having access to American goods is a great advantage. I was also told working the border holds "*mucha tentación*" (lots of temptation) because there are many opportunities to collect bribes from vendors without permits. For example, allowing a cart or ambulatory vendor to switch locations or operate without a permit in exchange for money. If an officer is caught collecting bribes they may get in trouble with their boss and get switched out of the border zone. The police working at the Linea are therefore rotated regularly an attempt to avoid long-term corruption.

*Reglamento*, the enforcers of local commercial laws, have different duties from the police. One of the main differences between police and *Reglamento* is that the latter are

required to seize commercial goods that are being peddled without permits. This causes vendors great hardship since this leaves them indebted to shops for the lost goods.

*Reglamento* officials don't wear uniforms so that they won't be easily detected when they arrive. However, because they are usually the same group of men, as soon as they are spotted, *corre la voz*, word runs or spreads about their presence and all those without a permit sit down, run away, or wait around inside the Market until *Reglamento* leaves.

Similar to the police, every zone in Tijuana has a group of *Reglamento* officials and a leader assigned to it. Some of the members are fixed and have been working in the office for decades; others come and go with the new city governments every three years. There are five areas of focus: alcohol, prostitution, ambulatory vendors, fixed vendors, and “*espectaculos*,” or large exhibitions or shows. There are certain “*puntos de conflicto*,” or sites of conflict in the city, where the breaking of laws is more visible and require constant surveillance. The Linea is one of these points.

The change of local government every three years affects day-to-day operations for *Reglamento* and by extension for border workers. Rules and regulations don't necessarily change, but the way they are enforced does. For example, under the previous leadership, *Reglamento* was extremely strict with its permit policy, allowing only vendors who carried permits under their name and with the specific *giro*, or bill, for what they were selling. Usually, vendors are left alone if they carry *any* valid permit, even if their name is not on the paper, or if the permit is for selling something other than what they are. Permit rental is a common practice for this reason. Currently, *Reglamento* has been more lax in its dealings.

600 commercial permits have been issued in the Linea, each with specific *giros* determining the kinds of goods the permit allows to sell, primarily food and souvenirs. Because a *giro* is nearly impossible to change, many vendors have permits designated for

souvenirs but sell food. Not only are the goods sold different, most vendors do not own the permits they carry, but rather rent out permits from others, or borrow a family member's permit. It's common to see a person selling ice cream and wearing a permit designated for souvenirs around their neck that has the name and photo of a different person, for example. It's also common to see counterfeit permits, as there are many in circulation.

The day-to-day operations of *Reglamento*, the way they choose to enforce legality, are often determined by political party alliances between the vendors unions and the local government. The border unions usually support one party over another so if the rivaling party comes to power (especially after it attempted to court the union prior to elections but did not received their support), it will take severe measures and enforce unenforced rules through *Reglamento* and even the Police, disrupting as much of the daily commercial activity as it can in retaliation.

### **Crossers**

The history of cross border movement is long and has changed much over the years, especially in the last few decades. While acknowledging the present always exists with the past, in this dissertation I will focus on the current situation, paying particular attention to U.S. citizens of Mexican descent residing in Tijuana and employed in San Diego, as the majority of the crossers I worked with fit into this category. Commuter border crossers currently enter the U.S. one of three ways, or put another way, crossers are allowed entry to into the country via three legal categories established by the U.S. state: being a U.S. citizen, a permanent resident (having a "Green Card"), or holding a temporary visa, the B1/B2 business/tourist visa, or Border Crossing Card (BCC). This last status doesn't allow employment, residency, or study in the U.S. The 2011 San Diego Association of Governments' Cross-Border Travel Behavior Survey reported that an estimated 81% of

weekly border crossers at the San Ysidro checkpoint are Baja California residents visiting San Diego, ostensibly BCC holders (SANDAG, 2011). The majority of border crossers are therefore tourist visa BCC holders. Accordingly, the primary reasons reported for traveling to the U.S. on a weekday were to shop (55%), to work (26%), and to “visit a friend or relative” (11%). I suspect the people surveyed underreported “work” as a reason for travel because BBC holders are not legally allowed to work in the U.S., though many still do.<sup>8</sup> This leaves close to 20% of crossers as U.S. citizens, permanent residents, and visitors from other countries. While there is no data in this study on this group, it is my impression U.S. citizens residing in Tijuana cross the border for the same reasons.

Border crossers working in the U.S. comprise around 4.5% of Tijuana’s employed population based on the 2010 Mexican Census (Vargas-Valle & Coubès, 2017). Despite this small percentage, this group is very important for the local economy as their higher income means they have more purchasing power. In 1998, for example, cross-border workers were 8% of the working population, but received 20% of total salaries in Tijuana (Alegria, 2002). Data from the same year showed 90% of this small cross-border work force was legally allowed to enter the U.S., but only 47% was legally allowed to work in the U.S. Broken down differently, 43% of cross border workers held tourist visas, 33% held Green Cards, 14% were U.S. citizens, and 10% had no visa at all, though Alegria (2002, p. 43) also points out not all people who had documents to work in the U.S. legally did (for example, 44% of U.S. citizens living in Tijuana didn’t work in the U.S.),<sup>9</sup> and not all of those who didn’t have documents to work in the U.S. did so without permission (only 8% of all tourist visa holders were employed in the U.S.). As we will see, these statistics have changed. The most glaring

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<sup>8</sup> As child and teenager living in Tijuana and commuting to San Diego to quasi-lawfully attend public school, I was taught “shopping” and “visiting friends/family” as the safe stock responses to the question “why are you crossing?”

<sup>9</sup> I should once again clarify the majority of U.S. citizens residing in Tijuana are Mexican, not white.

being that given heightened crossing restrictions, attempting to commute across the border without any documents (that 10% in 1998) is no longer possible.

Border crossers not only cross for different reasons and hold different legal statuses they also have diverse incomes. While working in the U.S. generally provides wages three times greater compared to working in Mexico (Alegria, 2002; Vargas-Valle & Coubès, 2017), even those crossing the border to work in San Diego have diverse incomes. Minimum wage in California is currently 10.50 USD (up from 9 USD in 2014). In San Diego it is 11.50 USD. Those border crossers who work full-time minimum wage jobs can make well over 300 USD per week. One crosser made around 230 USD a week including tips, working part-time. Another works full-time on commission so their weekly pay varies from 300 to 1,000 USD per week. Still, there are others who are salaried employees, meaning they can earn 600 USD or more weekly. For comparison, a salaried friend who is a university professor in Tijuana earns 6,700 MXN per week or 372 USD. However, while a California minimum wage job is higher earning than many professions in Mexico and substantially raises a Tijuana resident's standard of living, tougher surveillance make this is an increasingly risky occupation for the majority of border crossers who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents. Working with a BCC is not permitted and can lead to visa revocation. Many therefore choose to work part time, choose jobs with flexible schedules, or are self-employed. As sociologist Sergio Chavez (2016) has noted, visa card workers develop complicated border crossing strategies to avoid detection by CBP agents, such as alternating the ways and times of day they crossed, modifying their dress and appearance, as well as minding what they carried and the stories they told (p. 108-119).

Recent studies have shown a decline in a the number of Mexican border residents crossing to work in the U.S., a situation attributed to the post 9/11 border, the 2007

financial crisis and drug violence in Mexico, and one that signals rising socioeconomic inequality in the region (Orraca Romano, 2015; Vargas-Valle & Coubès, 2017). From 2000 to 2010, the percentage of cross-border workers dropped from 3.95% to 2.82% across the entire northern region, falling from 5.42% to 4.52% in the city of Tijuana (Vargas-Valle & Coubès, 2017). Notably, during the same period the percentage regional cross-border workers who were U.S. citizens rose from 14.3% to 23.3%,<sup>10</sup> while the percentage of cross-border workers who were born in non-border states and who had recently migrated to the border declined, a trend the authors suggest is due to internal migrants' low access to U.S. citizenship and the social networks necessary to enter the U.S. labor market (Vargas-Valle & Coubès, 2017, pp. 68-69). New Tijuana migrants from southern Mexico (and elsewhere) are generally poorer, having lower social capital compared to older migrants who often have networks across the border such as family residing in the U.S., U.S. born children, or a visa or residency obtained prior to stricter restrictions. Obtaining a tourist visa has become increasingly difficult for Mexican residents, who have to prove they have strong enough family or business ties to Mexico to ensure they will return after a brief visit. Many say this vague requirement, combined with a costly application process, translates to being able to obtain a visa only if you are rich and upper class. Muria and Chavez (2011) note that in the case of Tijuana residents, countless applicants are denied visas because it is suspected they will use this legal entry to illegally work in the U.S. Eligibility in these instances is therefore

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<sup>10</sup> While these are regional figures not specific to Tijuana, when comparing these numbers to those of the city from 1998, the percentage of U.S. citizen cross-border workers has expanded to fill the 10% of those who used to work without documents in San Diego. Likewise, this same study states the percentage of non-U.S. citizen cross-border workers across the region was 76.7% in 2010, a figure that does not specify the different legal statuses of workers, but that nonetheless closely represents the sum of visa (43%) and Green Card (33%) workers in Tijuana in 1998. Thus, while there is no way to corroborate this, it might be the case that while the total number of cross-border workers in Tijuana has dropped and the proportion of U.S. citizen workers has increased, the proportion of BCC and permanent resident workers remains relatively stable, pushing these groups towards more unstable occupations and elaborate performances as they are forced to conceal the true nature of their crossing.

precisely understood as “a secure source of income that decreases the risk the person will use the card to work illegally” (p. 362). As Vargas-Valle and Coubès (2017) conclude, in the past decade, interactions with the border (such as crossing it to go to work) have “passed from being a mechanism of social mobility to being a force that exacerbates social polarization” (p. 78).

Furthering this inequality, the U.S. state has established different modalities of crossing along border checkpoints, specifically, the separation of northbound car and pedestrian traffic into three groups with distinct levels of mobility based more on income than on legal status. The most elite group of border crossers is the Secure Electronic Network for Travelers Rapid Inspection (Sentri), a Trusted Traveler Program that opened two lanes in San Ysidro in 2000. This program requires extensive background checks, a personal interview with a CBP agent, and costs around 120 USD per person in a single registered vehicle. Once part of the program, users are able to travel through special lanes with significant speed since they are no longer subjected to the usual questioning. Sentri car lanes are separated from other lanes by road dividers. These dividers, combined with the fast travel speed of cars means vendors do not generally sell their goods to Sentri users. However, as the number of people crossing has increased, so too have those registered under Sentri.<sup>11</sup> The morning rush hour wait time for cars has increased from five to ten minutes to at least half an hour. As the Sentri lanes have been simultaneously expanded and slowed down to adapt to the high volume traffic, morning vendors have begun to sell food to them as well. Pedestrian Sentri users, on their part, have a speedier entry.

The second tier of travelers cross through the “Ready Lanes” established in 2011, which require a Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) card like the Sentri program. The

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<sup>11</sup> I suspect this dramatic rise in is related to the cross-border gentrification mentioned earlier. As more people move south to Tijuana and work in San Diego, they opt and are able to afford to pay for the Sentri ‘fast pass.’



newest resident and border crossing cards come equipped with RFID technology, but American citizens are required to hold a U.S. passport card, and not a regular passport, to use these special lanes. As more people renew their documents, the number of Ready Lane crossers has increased, but these lanes are still notably faster than the third tier of “General Traffic” travelers. Anyone who does not carry a RFID card travels through these slower lanes and is subject to more questioning. Though Ready Lane documents are increasingly becoming the norm, *tijuanenses* still call general traffic lanes *carriles normales* (normal lanes).

Additionally, there is the “Fast Pass Lane,” more commonly referred to as the “Medical Lane,” is a short cut guarded by local Mexican police that connects to “Ready Lanes” and is reserved for people holding a Medical Pass. The Medical Pass is a form designed by the Tijuana municipal government to encourage medical tourism in the region. Only vehicles with foreign license plates are allowed to use this lane that is open from 8:00 am to 10:00 pm. When a ‘foreigner’ visits certain doctors or dentists in Tijuana, Rosarito, or Ensenada, they receive a complimentary Medical Pass marking the date and the license plate of the car that will be crossing. Doctors purchase these passes from the city and though it is forbidden, many make personal use of these forms. These passes can also be purchased clandestinely for around 10 USD. This ‘Fast Lane’ is now also slowing down as more people purchase passes to avoid long waits.

### Chapter 3

#### *Todo lo que uno hace*

Please see included video.

Please also see Appendix B for Lourdes' life story as she recounted it to me.

## Chapter 4

## Walking: Vendors, Mobility, and the Space of the Border

I met Lourdes (Lulú) on August 1, 2012. After venturing into the *Mercado* on my own a few times that summer, I returned that day with Amy and Misael from the Cognate Collective, who I was meeting for the first time, and who introduced me to Lulú and others shop owners. She was by far the most memorable, I wrote in my notes. Lulú owned a convenience store-internet café-car insurance sales office shop. She worked the morning shift and her youngest son came in to work in the afternoon/evening after school. “She talked incessantly about music and poetry, half-boasted half-lamented spending nineteen hours on Facebook yesterday, kept all of the kids using the computers and running around her shop in check without even looking at them, and said things like ‘*me voy a tener que poner mucho aceite de oliva para que todo se me resbale*’ (I’m going to have to put on lots of olive oil so nothing [bad] sticks), before bursting into thunderous laughter.” A self-described *promotora cultural independiente* (independent cultural promoter), Lulú was the person to know if you were interested in or were working on a ‘cultural’ project. She seemed to know *everybody*—not only at the border, but everywhere in the city—from street people to politicians. Two days after we met, she took me on a “tour” of the Linea and nearby areas. She told me to bring my camera. She herself always carried a point-and-shoot and took a million photos of her daily life. I would later be horrified to learn she uploads all of these photos on Facebook. She fastidiously documents her own life and shares it with her friends. During this first walking tour, Lulú described her and her family’s history and relationship to various sites. *This is where I helped my uncle with his little lonchería when I first arrived to Tijuana | My kids used to walk all of the way here to deliver food orders | This used to be a drug tunnel, but now it’s an art gallery | Let me show you this shortcut*—as we walked into incoming traffic.



Lourdes on our first walking tour in 2012.



Lourdes and I striking a pose above the *Bordo* before continuing to walk around in 2014.

Later I learned that when people like me came looking for her, the first thing she did was take you on an impromptu “tour”—which amounted to walking around for hours, sometimes trailing behind her. (Lulú is older than me and has a bad knee but her seemingly infinite energy makes me feel like a slug. “It’s the Energizer batteries I stick up my ass, ha ha ha!”). She actually took me on several walking tours around downtown and beyond (areas walking distance from the border) when I returned to Tijuana to do fieldwork in 2014. The red light district, bars, her beloved *colonia Libertad*, the various shelters where *deportados* and other migrants resided, even around the *Bordo* (the Tijuana River canal where shelter-less *deportados* and others made their homes in the concrete and dirt. Drug sale and use was rampant. It was not a place to visit without someone known by the community). These were all places where she volunteered, worked, lived, or that she appreciated or were important to her in some way.

Sometimes we would simply walk to a place, walk around the site, and move on to the next one. Unlike our first and only tour around the Linea, this often happened with little explanation on her part. Other times we would go somewhere and do something there, like hand out food. Still other times I would just tag along as she did whatever business she had to do. *Acompañame, Mael*. Accompany me. Come with me; walk with me. I understood this was her way of educating me on Tijuana and her life here. She was showing me around so I would learn something. She expected me to learn something through guided observation. This kind of walking was a way for her to direct my attention, an embodied form of “look at this.” She expected me to learn something by simply being there, in a space, with her. She also expected I document everything, if possible, because ideally I would share it all later with the world—my world—as she did with her world on Facebook. Of course, walking was

also Lulú's way of sharing her life with me, a way for us to spend time together. Walking around was an act of immense generosity, openness, trust, and friendship.



When I did walk around town with her with a camera, the result was a kind of compounded attentional direction. She directed my attention towards something—*tómale a eso*, take a photo of this—that I would then pay attention to with my camera. The resulting photograph would in turn direct a future viewer's attention. Here we walked around the old pedestrian border entrance into Tijuana. I knew this path well; I had walked it every day on my way back home from school. Along with the *Puerta Mexico*, the area was cordoned off before being demolished. We snuck in to document the present-past. Pictured is an adjacent private property.



Lulú and I have since done more than walk (and drive!) around together and have become good friends. She was a key ‘informant’—crucial to making this project happen—and yet she does not make an appearance in my films about the border. Unlike other vendors, but like many shop owners or managers, Lulú spent most of her time sitting in her shop (in her case, behind a computer using Facebook). I spent a lot of time there too, especially when her son or nephew were around because they were easy to talk to, but I spent most of my time at the border outside of her shop and most of my time with Lulú outside of the border. When I first started filming I filmed her, but the footage did not work. As I quickly figured out, this was in part because there was little movement. There was a lot going on to be sure, but she and all of the people in her store were *doing* very little, at least with their bodies. For the most part, my filming of her shop made the life in it flat and bland. This is not to say that her shop is un-filmable. The point I’m making is that my difficulty in filming Lulú at work led me to reflect further on the kinds of work, practices, and movements that take place at the border, and that, despite her absence in the film (and in my day-to-day at the border), she was highly influential in ways I’m only now beginning to articulate. Her impulse to show me around when we first met, for example, was significant because it underlined walking as an existential, meaning-making, social, and epistemological practice.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, I discuss walking as a spatialized and space-making practice at the border. Specifically, I discuss the movements of ambulatory vendors to examine the kind of space made through walking (and walking *with*, in my case, often also with a camera).<sup>2</sup> I argue

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<sup>1</sup> Years later, I asked Lourdes to take me on another walking tour of the Linea so I could film it, but the entire event resulted in a series of drawn-out rants against city officials for the demolition of the *Puerta Mexico* bridge. That footage did not work either.

<sup>2</sup> Not everyone walks the border. Some vendors don’t walk at all, some roll through in wheelchairs and bicycles, and in the case of border crossers, some drive cars and motorcycles. As I will later discuss, for border

that the freeform movements of vendors compared with the mechanized and restricted movement (immobility) of crossers shapes these two groups' affective relationship to the *Línea*. Following Ingold's insight on how humans make meaning through walking, I posit that vendors' freeform walking results in a more open-ended and diversified understanding of the space of the border compared to crossers. While crossers are mobile as they move across the border daily, they remain relatively immobile in this site as they wait in line. Vendors do not generally cross the border and are perceived to be static and immobile, yet are hyper-mobile when compared to crossers. This observation runs counter to a common narrative that presents documented border crossers as a highly mobile and thus privileged group. My intention is not to argue that having documents to enter the U.S. from Mexico is not a privileged status—it most certainly is. Rather, following some of the work of geographers and scholars in mobility studies, I am challenging the often-unquestioned association between privilege and mobility by asking what counts as 'mobility,' that is, what kinds of movements and whose mobilities count. I propose examining 'micro' border movements by focusing on the most dominant and elementary manifestation of movement in this space—the practice of walking.<sup>3</sup>

### **Mobilities at *La Línea***

To be at the *Línea* is to notice movement. People walk around, run, moving signs or their hands; taillights flicker; heat rises from car hoods; a mirage; a gust of wind; a moving

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crossers the type of mobility one has, walking or otherwise, is often tied to social class. Moreover, beyond the movement of people, there are many other kinds of movements at the border: of goods, of capital, of ideas, of air and pollution, of dirt, of birds and rodents, to name a few. My focus here will be on the walking some vendors do, with the hope this will serve as a starting point for future explorations into other kinds of border 'micro' mobilities.

<sup>3</sup> As with 'space' and 'place', I make no distinction here between the terms 'movement' and 'mobility.' Movement, space, and time are always in relation. Put to words, movement "is the spatialization of time and temporalization of space" (Creswell, 2006, p. 4), but because these happen simultaneously, even this definition is limited.



cloud; a voice grows louder as it gets near; people wait in line to move across the border; day becomes night...Goods and people move across the border through checkpoints and under them through secret tunnels. If the border is action-motion (revolver), and the Linea is full of movements, and the city, like Earth, are always in motion as they move around the Sun, a star in a galaxy also in motion, it becomes clear movement is a defining characteristic of *everything* in the known universe. Which is a grand way of saying movement is fundamental to life and the capacity for mobility essential to being human. Nevertheless, mobility also exists in relation to immobility, both of which are socially constructed and produced.

Geographer Tim Cresswell (2006) explains how two metanarratives (imaginative “moral geographies”) have informed our understanding of mobility in the modern western world: “sedentarist metaphysics”<sup>4</sup> and “nomadic metaphysics.”

The first sees mobility through the lens of place, rootedness, spatial order, and belonging. Mobility, in this formulation, is seen as morally and ideologically suspect, a by-product of a world arranged through place and spatial order. The second puts mobility first, has little time for notions of attachment to place, and revels in notions of flow, flux, and dynamism. Place is portrayed as stuck in the past, overly confining, and possibly reactionary. (p. 26)

These two views of mobility, in turn, represent a “...tension between mobility as an excess—a threat to the principles of [modern] order—and mobility as a central conduit of life in modernity” (p. 83). Moreover, this conflict manifests at the scale of the physical body (where mobility begins), between “...actual lived and embodied motion—always potentially excessive and threatening—and the rationalized and abstracted mobility of philosophers,

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<sup>4</sup> Cresswell borrows the term from anthropologist Liisa Malkki who argues fixed and bounded notions of culture and place-based identity produce a discourse that presents mobile people—refugees, in particular—as morally deviant.

planners, technocrats, and others who have attempted, through representation, to make mobility functional, ordered, and in the end, knowable” (p. 58).<sup>5</sup> By nature, mobility is difficult to pin down; it is ephemeral and absent. To reflect on mobility is to look to the past. This material and embodied excess presents a predicament for modern calls for rationality and order. Hence, similar to the notion of border, conceptions of mobility “...are often informed by a desire to fix what is unfixable in order to make it knowable within a clear spatial framework” (p. 58). Creswell argues further, “...it is not just a case of fixity against flow, or place against mobility, but of ordering and taming mobilities by placing one against another—by producing some mobilities that are ideologically sound and others that are suspect” (p. 58). Mobility has thus simultaneously been at the heart of modernity and at the center of modernity’s attempts to “capture” it (p. 58).

In their mapping of “The New Mobilities Paradigm,” sociologists Sheller and Urry (2006), position the ‘transdisciplinary’ field of mobility studies as moving beyond both sedentarist and nodamic theories, emphasizing that a critique of sedentarism does not presume notions of mobility as inherently liberating. They “do not insist on a new ‘grand narrative’ of mobility, fluidity, or liquidity. The new mobilities paradigm suggests a set of questions, theories, and methodologies rather than a totalising or reductive description of the contemporary world” (p. 210). As such, the study of mobility is as much about movement as it is about stillness and immobility. The field encompasses the study of different scales and types of movement (from the individual body to macro systems), and diverse theoretical and methodological approaches. Sheller (2011) explains,

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<sup>5</sup> This again raises the question of the potential of “thirdspace” (Soja) or “lived space” (Lefebvre), where more generative and imaginative representations of mobility occur. What would a poet or artist contribute against these representations that attempt to capture and fix mobility?

Mobilities research combines social and spatial theory in new ways, and in so doing has provided a transformative nexus for bridging micro-interactional research on the phenomenology of embodiment, the cultural turn and hermeneutics, postcolonial and critical theory, macro-structural approaches to the state and political-economy, and elements of science and technology studies (STS) and new media studies. (p. 1)

The research focuses not only on human mobility, but also on non-humans, objects, information, capital, and images, as well as the physical and virtual infrastructures that facilitate such movement, travel and communication (Sheller, 2011, p. 2). The “[departure] from the traditions of social theory that focus on structure *in relation to* (human) agency” (Sheller, 2011, p. 3), along with the field’s emphasis on materiality, spatiality, and temporality often associated with the study of sensory and embodied human movement, is what I find most compelling and relevant to this project.<sup>6</sup>

My focus on the movement of vendors at the border does not follow the ‘nomadic’ tradition that conceives movement as liberating per se. As Sheller and Urry (2006) have noted, “...all mobilities entail specific often highly embedded and immobile infrastructures,” therefore, “It is not a question of privileging a ‘mobile subjectivity,’ but rather of tracking the power of discourses and practices of mobility in creating both movement and stasis” (pp. 210-211). The U.S. border apparatus restricts and controls the movement of people and goods, establishing increasingly refined categories of entry and surveillance at the service of political and capital interests. Some goods and people are deemed “legal” and allowed entry, while those deemed “illegal” are denied. Massey’s (1994) critique of Harvey’s “time-space compression” speaks well to this point. The notion of time-space compression—the

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<sup>6</sup> See also Adey (2009), Adey et al. (2014), Merriman (2012), and Soderstrom et al. (2013) for overviews on the field of mobility studies.

shrinking of distance—assumes the unfettered mobility of capital such that space becomes irrelevant. But as Massey points out, everyone experiences this heightened mobility differently, where some have more control to initiate movements and gain power in doing so, some may be moving but have little power over their mobility, and others might be highly immobile because of these global movements. When approached from this macro ‘global’ scale, border crossers fit into the first two categories while most vendors fit into the third.

Pallitro & Heyman (2008) have noted how Senti and other border surveillance programs produce inequalities of rights, risk classification, and movement, leading to differentiated mobilities across and within state borders among documented border crossers. Frequent border crossers traveling by foot are generally of a lower social class than those who cross the border by car through ‘general traffic’ or ‘Ready lanes’. ‘SENTRI’ users are usually of a higher social class. As expected, speed and ease of movement, as well as level of physical comfort, become markers of privilege and socioeconomic status. While crossing by car is a more limited sensory experience than that of pedestrian crossers and vendors, in the context of the long wait times of the border, sitting in a car is preferable to standing. The rich sensory experience of the pedestrian also taxes the body; feet and legs hurt, the sun or rain become unbearable. For vendors, this physical labor is part of their work. For pedestrian crossers, this physical labor is part of their work of crossing the border. Having a car is a luxury many people cannot afford. Walking is thus a kind of mobility understood to belong to the lower classes. Relatedly, the majority of vendors do not have documents to cross the border, and even those who do rarely cross. Their lack of cross-border mobility and legal access to the U.S. marks them as lower class. Both crossers and vendors are equally subject to CBP’s rules and regulations, either directly as they attempt to cross the border, or

indirectly, as the ever-changing traffic influences sales. However, vendors' freedom of movement within the space of la Línea complicates the notion that movement across the border is a wholly privileged position. Even those crossers usually associated with faster and easier, or *more* mobility, are subjected to *less* movement and at times to complete immobility. In this liminal space, those who move do not move, and those who do not, do.

In rejecting the triumphalism of nomadic perspectives that celebrate “border crossings” and border movement with little regard to power and inequality, some border studies anthropologists have embraced this macro state-centered framework to argue that more than crossings, “border inspections” and border barriers characterize the lives of working class people (Lugo, 2000). Alternatively, scholars discuss the border as a mobility-regulating apparatus, using mobility as a counterpoint to “enclosure,” or “the political-economic processes by which people, nature, commodities, and knowledge are bounded, emplaced, and allowed or forced to move” (Cunningham & Heyman, 2004, p. 289). While I wholeheartedly agree with this analysis, I find it is limited because of its scale of reference (which is also a way of saying, it is limited in its spatial imagination). When approached from the scale of the physical body, the question of mobility changes—border crossers (as previously stated, a diverse group with varying degrees of privileged mobility) become immobile, whereas vendors become hyper-mobile.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Studies of globalization and neoliberalism have argued against an assumed conflictive relationship between the notions of ‘local’ and ‘global’ (Kearny, 1995; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). These two categories are now mostly understood to exist relationally, that is, as mutually constitutive, and as influencing one another—a two-directional flow—rather than the global being imposed on the local (Freeman, 2001). Even when described relationally, however, a hierarchy remains. Maybe it is simply too difficult to conceptualize a space-time that does not assume ‘the local is here and the global is out there.’ Regardless, our limited imagination is what keeps notions of large-scale processes, and the grand theories we use to explain them, in a privileged analytical position. Again, this is perhaps inevitable; analyzing life and the world is always about inventing structures, categories, and formulas to help us better understand them, and concepts have a way of appearing to exist in the ether.

This straightforward observation does not deny the macro-scale analysis, but it does demand we ask how opposing and contradictory dynamics are able to exist simultaneously. This contradiction between scales of analysis also reminds us to continually attend to our theoretical and epistemological frameworks as they shape not only our analysis, but also the questions we are able to ask and the observations we are able to make. I propose that a more integrated and relational notion of space-time that offers a complex and multilayered perspective on mobility helps explain this contradiction. As we will see, Ingold's (2006) investigation into "lines," together with phenomenologically informed filmmaking, provide a useful entry point to exploring the practice of walking because these approaches integrate movement, space, and time at different scales.

Additionally, while this project does not imagine movement as intrinsically freeing, it does adopt the notion of mobility as a potentially subversive becoming by examining mobility primarily as an embodied practice. Cresswell (2006) aligns this notion within a nomadic metaphysics where "...mobility is linked to a world of practice, of anti-essentialism, anti-foundationalism, and resistance to established forms of ordering and discipline [...]. Linking all of these, perhaps, is the idea that by focusing on mobility, flux, flow, and dynamism we can emphasize the importance of *becoming* at the expense of the already achieved—the stable and static" (p. 47). Approaching mobility at the scale of the body, movement and motion become "practiced"—practiced in the sense that mobility is socially produced, but also in the sense that moving is a kind of *doing*. Nomadic or not, this approach shares in this post-structuralist interest in practice. Specifically, it follows phenomenological perspectives on movement and space focused on this state of becoming as particularly generative and knowledgeable, precisely because it is in-between. This project therefore

conceives the movement of walking at the border as an in-between practice of becoming and making, in an in-between place.

Walking, along with other “micro-mobilities of the body” (Sheller, 2011, p. 7), has been an area interest in mobility studies particularly for cultural geographers and anthropologists (Hall & Smith, 2013; Ingold & Vergunst, 2008b; Lee & Ingold, 2006; Lorimer, 2011; Myers, 2010, 2011; Vergunst, 2010). Mobility studies scholars have also called for new “mobile methods” to better investigate the ephemeral and embodied aspects of mobilities and immobilities (Büscher et al., 2010; Cresswell & Merriman, 2011; Fincham et al., 2010; Hannam et al., 2006, Sheller & Urry, 2006), including cyber research and the use of multimedia platforms, and in the case of walking, participant-observation ‘on the move’ (Kusenbach, 2003). As part of these mobile methods, some have also explored the use of video, especially within the field of human geography (Brown & Spinney, 2010; Laurier, 2010; Pink, 2007; Simpson, 2014; Spinney, 2011). As we will see in the sections that follow, the interest in walking, how walking is experienced, and ways of conveying this experience to others all lie at the heart of anthropological and phenomenological concerns.

### **The Image of *La Línea***

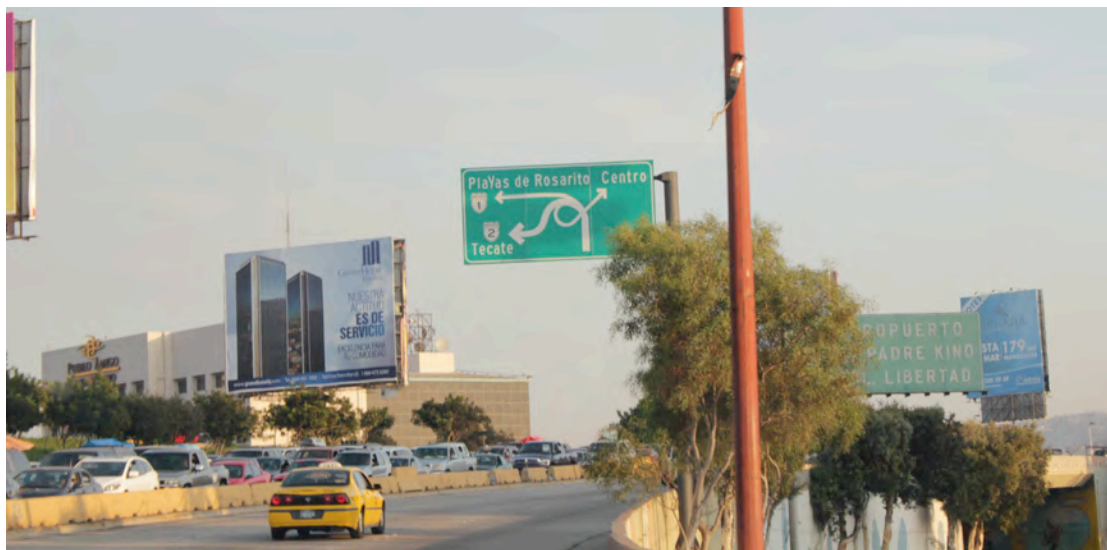
Hanging on a wall in Lulú’s shop was a framed replica of a painting of the Línea of unknown origin signed “Pabel 1990.”





She and I both love this painting because it vividly captures the chaos and absurdity of the border. The image is not accurate—the perspective is off, much of what is going on there would never happen in real life—it is a visual parody of the Linea. Yet, it is precisely through its comical exaggeration and excess (full of kind appreciation, nonetheless) that this painting is able to convey an intangible aspect of the place—the “life” of the border itself.

As a whole, the space of the Linea is labyrinthian and confusing, difficult to describe and navigate unless you are familiar with it, and even then, everyone’s mental maps seem to be different enough to make it hard to explain where one was upon reflection. But the border is also perplexing because of the kinds of things that happen there; the action and movement of the border foment this confusion. *La Linea revuelve*. Chaotic activity exaggerates the spatial mix-up and vice versa. As I have said before, to study this space then means to study its movement. Perhaps this is why totalizing, bird’s-eye view images of the border prevail (and also fail)—they fix and stop the motion in an attempt to capture an impossible and nonexistent stable cohesion, in an attempt to rid themselves of the between, the *revoltura* (revolting, confusion).



A road sign anticipating multiple forks upon entering Tijuana

In *The Image of the City* (1960), urban planner Kevin Lynch approaches the city by studying how inhabitants perceive their urban environments and form “mental images.” These images result from the active engagement between people and their environment. He explains the relationship this way:

The environment suggests distinctions and relations, and the observer—with great adaptability and in light of his own purposes—selects, organizes, and endows with meaning what he sees. The image so developed now limits and emphasizes what is seen, while the image itself is being tested against the filtered perceptual input in a constant interacting process. Thus the image of a given reality may vary significantly between different observers. (p. 6)

These images are thus in constant flux as changing external sensory information is processed by an observer also in constant transformation. And while every person develops a distinct image, commonalities arise from interacting with a single physical space, resulting in “public images,” or a shared and communal mental image. They are intrinsic to human survival and development because they provide a basis for our mobility, and thus, for our learning. Put differently, we use our image of the environment to process and understand information, and to decide how to move through and act in the world. Mental images help us locate ourselves and find our way. Furthermore, just as sensory experience with/in the external world shapes these images, so too do memory and feeling. These images then represent how we structure, identify, and give meaning to our environment. For Lynch, having a ‘clear’ or ‘legible’ mental image of a city was crucial for the success and happiness of society. A legible city is one designed to make day-to-day movement easy and effective. Equally important to functionally though is aesthetic value. Legibility then also involves distinctive and eye-catching design, as this aspect is what attracts the observer thereby ensuring a deeper

affective engagement with the environment. For Lynch, this is the challenge for urban planners, to continually build and shape cities harmoniously and beautifully in order to make residents' lives fuller and enjoyable.

This is what Lynch termed “imageability,” or:

That quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer. It is the shape, color, or arrangement which facilitates the making of vividly identified, powerfully structured, highly useful mental images of the environment. It might also be called *legibility*, or perhaps *visibility* in a heightened sense, where objects are not only able to be seen, but are presented sharply and intensely to the senses. (1960, p. 9-10)

Tijuana is not a highly imageable city; it is sprawling, disjointed, segregated, disharmoniously varied, irregular, ugly even. The only element that makes Tijuana legible in Lynch's sense is the border. The Linea specifically is one of the most imageable sites of Tijuana. Vendors and crossers alike carry the strongest mental images of the Linea of any Tijuana resident, though these two groups' images remain very distinct.

Based on his research with city dwellers, Lynch determined the image of the city could be broken down to five formal elements: the path, the edge, the node, the district, and the landmark.<sup>8</sup> The Linea encompasses all of these. The site itself cannot be conceived as a city, but in relation to the rest of Tijuana, all of these elements make up the image of the

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<sup>8</sup> “**Paths** are the channels along which the observer customarily, occasionally, or potentially moves. They may be streets, walkways, transit lines, canals, railroads [...]. **Edges** are the linear elements not used or considered as paths by the observer. They are boundaries between two phases, linear breaks in continuity: shores, railroad cuts, edges of development, walls. They are lateral references rather than coordinate axes [...]. **Districts** are medium-to-large sections of the city, conceived of as having two-dimensional extent, which the observer mentally enters ‘inside of,’ and which are recognizable as having some common, identifying character [...]. **Nodes** are points, the strategic spots in a city into which an observer can enter, and which are intense foci to and from which he is traveling...Or the nodes may be simply concentrations, which gain their importance from being the condensation of some use or physical character [Nodes can be the epitome and symbol of a district. They also usually are a convergence of *paths*]... **Landmarks** are another type of point-reference, but in this case the observer does not enter within them, they are external” (1960, pp. 47-48).

Linea. Lynch cites that for most people's images, "paths" and "districts" are the most important elements. Paths tend to be the most dominant feature because "people observe the city while moving through it, and along these paths the other environmental elements are arranged and related" (1960, p. 47). But people also tend to locate themselves 'inside' and within specific, distinct areas, or, districts. Under this rubric, the notions of "path" and "district" dominate the images of the Linea of crossers and vendors. If we agree that space is made through movement, that a district is conceived as such because of the paths that run through it, then the image of the Linea can be more accurately described as composed by the intertwining and entangled paths, routes, or lines of vendors and crossers.

### Lines

To be a place, every somewhere must lie on one or several paths of movement to and from places elsewhere. Life is lived, I reasoned, along paths, not just in places, and paths are lines of a sort. It is along paths, too, that people grow into knowledge of the world around them, and describe this world in the stories they tell.

--Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History*

*Une ligne rencontre une ligne. Une ligne évite une ligne. Aventures de lignes.*

*Une ligne pour le plaisir d'être ligne, d'aller, ligne.*

*Une ligne rêve. On n'avait jusque-là jamais laissé rêver une ligne.*

(A line meets a line. A line avoids a line. Adventures of lines.

A line for the pleasure of being a line, of going, line.

A line dreams. We had never before let a line dream.)

--Henri Michaux, *Aventures de lignes*

As mentioned before, *la Línea*—the Line—refers to the geopolitical boundary between Mexico and the United States, but also describes the length of the queues leading to the customs inspection booths of the border checkpoint. Anthropologist Rihan Yeh (2009) has previously explained these "two meanings [...] run perpendicular to each other: an east-west line signifying prohibition, and a north-south line signifying passage" (465). These meanings reflect an understanding of the border as an imposed, straight horizontal line dividing the U.S. and Mexico, a militarized line maintained through heavy surveillance (as in

the term “frontline”). This is the line of the Customs and Border Protection agency, of the U.S. state. This is the line of domination, empire, and death. This line dictates and controls northbound movement, shaping the other *línea*, the line of cars, the length of which determines commuting time for border crossers and border vendors’ livelihoods.

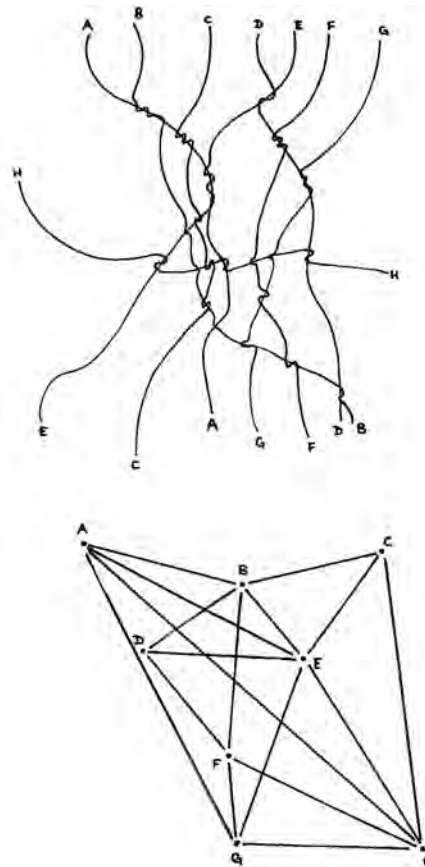
While these two meanings are rooted in the existence of the geopolitical line, in every day speech ‘*la Línea*’ in Tijuana also refers more broadly to the space surrounding the border checkpoint, “the area that borders on the border” (Yeh, 2009; 465). This area includes the north-south line(s) of border crossers that Yeh noted, but also a collection of roads, commercial areas, neighborhoods, and other sites understood to compose an unmapped and unofficially defined ‘border district’. This meaning is more ambiguous and demonstrates a more amorphous conception of “border,” a notion that signals the varied and multiple lines that make up the San Ysidro border checkpoint beyond the geopolitical border itself. The border as the straight line that divides the U.S. and Mexico stands against the many other crooked and meandering lines moving around and across it. This project conceives of the geopolitical border as a line to examine more freely the other lines people follow and make when they move around and across the border line. As I will show, not just one or two, but multiple interweaving lines make up the *Línea*.

These different local meanings attached to the “*Línea*” help clarify the border studies debate on material vs. figurative studies about the border discussed in the introductory chapter. The notion of *la Línea* already encompasses both perspectives. The question should not be which category to privilege because, after all, they always exist in relation to one another. The question is rather what we understand a border to be in the first place, and relatedly, how invested we are in maintaining the borders around and in-between our own notions about the world. This debate reflects how the notion of border has been largely

unquestioned and taken for granted. I agree with Alvarez' (2012) warning that the new emphasis on the materiality of the border produces a conceptual and unimaginative "bounded-horizontality" that "reproduces the state-centric focus on security and the maintenance of boundaries" (p. 30). However, his alternative of 'connecting bridges' does not stray from but rather affirms this one-dimensional (linear) understanding of the border as a function of the nation state. As the case of the *Linea* attests, the border is more than a geopolitical line. Moving away from this view does not mean disregarding structures of power or denying state and capitalist violence at the border (and *because of* the border). This line truly is an "open wound" as Anzaldúa said; a line of death, a line many have died defending or crossing. Opening up our understanding of border in fact has the opposite effect—it reveals the insidious machinations of power and forces us to reflect on the limitations (and power) of our own conceptual and theoretical approaches. Perhaps more importantly, investigating the other lines that make up this amorphous image of the *Linea* might help us to more effectively contest the frontier line instead of unwittingly accepting and reinforcing it, or worse, constructing new border lines of our own.

Ingold's (2007) anthropological study into the nature and history of the line presents a useful distinction between the sets of lines described above. For him, lines manifest movement and growth, but the modern world has stripped them of this movement, giving rise to a static notion of 'linearity,' one that presents the line as straight and one-dimensional. "Once the trace of a continuous gesture, the line has been fragmented – under the sway of modernity – into a succession of points or dots" (p. 75). This modern dotted line is not a line, but rather a succession of moments where nothing moves or grows. It presents a set of discrete if interconnected destinations to be seen all at once as on a map; it is the line of the node and network. Arriving at the same critique of geographers and space theorists, Ingold

argues this has also changed our notion of place, now characterized as containing all life and activity thereby also fixing it in discrete moments in time. Whereas the first line moves freely and unhurriedly along a path with a beginning or end, the second line moves quickly across one location to the next in a straight line because its main objective is reaching a specific destination. He explains, “Both kinds of movement, along and across, may be described by lines, but they are lines of fundamentally different kinds. The line that goes along has, in Klee’s terms, gone out for a walk. The line that goes across, by contrast, is a connector, linking a series of points arrayed in two-dimensional space” (p. 75).



From Ingold (2007, p. 82), figure depicting a “meshwork” versus a “network”

Ingold goes on to link the movements of ‘wayfaring’ and ‘transport’ to these two types of lines, respectively, where transport dissolves the connection between locomotion and perception that wayfaring binds together, thereby influencing how we exist in and understand the world. Wayfaring, he argues, “is the most fundamental mode by which living beings, both human and non-human, inhabit the earth,” where the inhabitant “...participates from within in the very process of the world’s continual coming into being and who, in laying a trail of life, contributes to its weave and texture. These lines are typically winding and irregular, yet comprehensively entangled into a close-knit tissue” (p. 81). Borrowing the term from Lefebvre (1974/1991), Ingold describes this inhabited world as a “meshwork” made up of interwoven lines “the trails *along* which life is lived” (p. 81), a meshwork is the “entangle[ment of] lines of life, growth and movement” (Ingold, 2011, p. 63).<sup>9</sup> Transport, on the other hand, reflects the appropriation of spaces through delineation and frontier lines, the ongoing occupation of the ‘inhabited’ world by imperial powers, “throwing a network of connections across what appears, in their eyes, to be not a tissue of trail but a blank surface. These connections are lines of occupation [...] Unlike paths formed through the practices of wayfaring, such lines are surveyed and built in advance of the traffic that comes to pass up and down them. They are typically straight and regular, and intersect only at nodal points of power” (Ingold, 2007, p. 81). As Lynch (and as we will see, De Certeau and Lefebvre) alludes to, these two distinct types of lines represent a dilemma for the city-dweller because the city is built to be ‘occupied’ for transport, not to be ‘inhabited’ through wayfaring. The city’s built environment contains and its roads connect, creating a tension between the moving

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<sup>9</sup> To recall, Lefebvre and Massey have previously described space in this manner (as a “set of relations”), where space/place is not bounded or fixed but always under construction, as it is constituted by and constitutive of moments of multiple simultaneous relations. Ingold’s contribution here is not so much about a new understanding of space per se, but a reminder that how we imagine and conceive of space is important (as geographers have long argued). Furthermore, his notion of lines links space and time without privileging one or the other or denying their independent and relational complexity (akin to but in a more concrete and anthropological manner than Lefebvre’s concept of rhythms).



lines of freedom and life, and the static lines of restriction and death.

At the Linea, we see a combination of these lines. The lines of cars and people moving north, though structured and restricted by the straight lines of the inspection booths and different categories of entry, are themselves irregular lines as border crossers maneuver the space to find the fastest way through. Drivers cut each other off, sometimes creating *lineas falsas* (false lines)—lanes that do not lead to a booth but rather another car lane. Crossers twist and turn the steering wheel or their bodies to adjust to the topography of the area, which is anything but even and straight. Border crossers' movements are characterized by their stasis and restricted mobility. The geopolitical line of occupation dictates how and where they should stay “in line.” They transport themselves across a border to their destination, moving against time in attempts to leave this in-between period and space as quickly as possible. Ingold elaborates, “For passengers, strapped to their seats, travel is no longer an experience of movement in which action and perception are intimately coupled, but has become one of enforced immobility and sensory deprivation. On arrival, the traveller is released from his bonds only to find that his freedom of movement is circumscribed within the limits of the site” (p.102). This is indeed the case of those who cross the border by car, who are doubly immobilized by their vehicles and CBP procedures. The slow moving traffic accentuates the sense of entrapment of drivers as they repeatedly press the accelerator and brake only to make little progress. Contained inside their cars, there is a screen between them and the elements and the activities outside, their senses deprived. In their work on the aesthetics and design of American highways, Appleyard, Lynch, and Myer describe the experience of driving:

The modern car interposes a filter between the driver and the world through which he is moving. Sounds, smells, sensations of touch and weather are all diluted in

comparison with what the pedestrian experiences. Vision is framed and limited; the driver is relatively inactive. (1964, p. 4)

At the border, the car also limits the physical movement and vision of drivers, but because they are not moving as they would on a highway, drivers have an opportunity to take in more of the scenery, including sounds and smells, as well as taste. Windows are often rolled down, vans' sliding doors wide open, and passengers sometimes even get out of their cars to walk around the outside of the Mercado. Here, drivers seek stimulation and are often eager to engage vendors. However, prolonged waiting also has the effect of imposing sensation on the body, even while sitting, bodies ache, get hungry, need to urinate...

Those who cross on foot have full sensory experience of the environment, but their lack of movement—the forced waiting—inflicts painfully on their senses because they are more exposed than those crossing by car. This extreme immobility and waiting exacerbates the importance of duration and speed of travel, already a problem in any kind of destination-oriented transport. Thus for the border crosser, the significance of time is excessive. Yet this dreaded and oppressive waiting is precisely what leads to the formation of social bonds and a deep connection with place. As crossers note, a sense of “community” develops especially between pedestrian crossers who stand side-by-side rather than encapsulated by sheets of metal. It is not true, as Ingold asserts, “the traveller who departs from one location and arrives at another is, in between, nowhere at all” (p. 84). At the border, the *where* is the between. Here transport movement slows down such that it forces ‘habitation’. Creating thick grooves on the ground, these slow repetitive and repeating lineal movements force attunement with the environment and even introspection.

On their end, vendors create freeform lines as they weave their way between and around lanes of traffic to sell their goods. Vendors are more like wayfarers, moving about

without a set destination. They set out without a fixed route, making their path as they go. “The path of the wayfarer,” Ingold explains, “wends hither and thither, and may even pause here and there before moving on. But it has no beginning or end. While on the trail the wayfarer is always somewhere, yet every ‘somewhere’ is on the way to somewhere else. The inhabited world is a reticulate meshwork of such trails, which is continually being woven as life goes on along them” (pp. 81-84). This is how vendors move around the Linea. The space is an interconnected whole they mostly freely move through. Ingold explains that wayfarers are not concerned with speed, “what matters is not how fast one moves, in terms of the ratio of distance to elapsed time, but that this movement should be in phase with, or attuned to, the movements of other phenomena of the inhabited world” (p. 101). In the context of the Linea, speed of movement matters because it is an important characteristic of the place. Meandering vendors attuned to the environment means they have to tend to speed. If the line is moving too fast and their driver moves, or if they are not carrying what the potential customer asks for, they have to run to make the sale. *Aquí todo mundo siempre está corriendo* (Everyone is always running [in a hurry] here), Manuel once said to me while we walked. I turned to look and saw a man carrying a large figurine running at an impossible speed. Manuel was new to the city and his comment sounded like a lament, but he said it so definitively that I wasn’t sure if he meant *aquí* in the Linea or *aquí* in Tijuana. While it’s true the pace of the Linea varied from hour to hour keeping everyone on their toes, it’s also true city life in general is fast-paced. Tijuana pushes everyone around. Therefore, though more attuned to one or the other, vendors and crossers share in both wayfinding and transport qualities of movement, in large part because such categories become mixed up in this place.

For most vendors, the Linea is a worksite, a destination. Like crossers, they too ‘transport’ themselves there from their homes. Nevertheless, their social life revolves around

the Linea; they spend most of their time there forming close relationships with others, not to mention entire families have worked there for years. After dramatically leaving one of Lulú's computers, a young man protested Facebook was "stupid"—signing in meant reading posts of "the same dumb shit" people already say in person. It's because all of my Facebook friends are from the Linea, he complained. I heard this complaint about Facebook several times. For vendors, the Linea is a kind of home because rather than occupy it, they thoroughly inhabit it.

In Tijuana, the image of the border is a line, "*the* line"—the line of origin. Yet this is a "line" composed of many lines. More than any of Lynch's urban elements, *la Línea* is a "knot"—it doesn't 'contain' life like a node does, connecting via transport lines to other nodes in a network, but is rather made up of "the very lines along which life is lived" (Ingold, 2007, p. 101). These lines of life become entangled in knots (though not bounded by them), making up the "meshwork" that is the border lifeworld. "Every place," Ingold explains, "is a knot in the meshwork, and the threads from which it is traced are lines of wayfaring" (*ibid.*). This means wayfarers are not confined to the places they habitate, but also do not meander aimlessly. Wayfaring is rather a type of place-making.

As shop owner Angel put it: "*la Línea es vida*" (the Line is life). The various paths or lines crossers and vendors move through form the border, giving it life. At the same time, it is through and because of the border line that these two groups are able to make a living. If moving through the world is how we make and come to know it, then by following some of these lines of life—walking through them (again and again)—we may begin to untangle this knot of relationships and find some of their meaning.

## Walking

### **Caminante no hay camino**

*Caminante, son tus huellas  
el camino, y nada más;  
Caminante, no hay camino,  
se hace camino al andar.  
Al andar se hace camino,  
y al volver la vista atrás  
se ve la senda que nunca  
se ha de volver a pisar.  
Caminante, no hay camino,  
sino estelas en la mar.*

### **Wayfarer, there is no path**

Wayfarer, your footprints  
are the path, and nothing else;  
Wayfarer, there is no path,  
the path is made by walking.  
Walking makes the path,  
and upon looking back  
you see the trail that will never  
be tread on again.  
Wayfarer, there is no path,  
only wakes in the sea.

Antonio Machado, excerpt from "Proverbios y cantares XXIX" in *Campos de Castilla* (1912).

However cliché, it would be remiss of me to not share this popular poem by Spanish poet Antonio Machado. “*Caminante*” has been variously translated as “traveler,” “wanderer,” even “walker.” I find the term “wayfarer” is more appropriate (though a little highfalutin compared to the Spanish) because it speaks to the walking element without evoking a particular destination or the sense of lack of direction or purpose. The *caminante* in this poem is walking neither *somewhere* nor *nowhere*. Walking is a way to be; to walk is to exist. This poem captures the sense that walking along a path—a path we actively make by moving through it—is indeed how we make our way along “the line of life.”

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My first days in the Mercado I was often disoriented. This struck me as very strange; it seemed small enough to be an easy space to navigate. I suppose the alternating closed stalls, similarity between shops, and the fact the built structures sit at a 45-degree angle on the south-north axis were to blame. This angle maximizes the storefront space facing vehicular traffic, making the Mercado more inviting and accessible. However, this design also makes the space somewhat inaccessible because the cardinal orientation shifts.

Additionally, multiple corridors connect each set of shops, meaning there are several ways to arrive to any given place, making it feel like a maze. To make matters more mystifying, the Mercado changes appearance often: depending on the time of day locked gates close off some of the corridors, and shops used for storage are open one moment and closed the next. People, objects, and other elements are constantly in flux: there, not there, in a different position. I would often see people dressed in nice clothes wearing sunglasses warily wandering the halls before everyone around would point them in the direction of the bathroom. The inside of the Mercado nowadays is a space where vendors convene to prepare their food for sale or pack up their carts, eat at the one of the several *loncherias*, or simply to sit and hang around its small courtyards. A stranger there sticks out, but not so much (at the end of the day, it is a space open to the public, a public that is sitting inside cars, but still). What sticks out more is a stranger feeling out of place in that space. Having drivers nervously walk around looking for bathrooms—the more expensive their clothes, the more tense their gait—sticks in vendors' minds, a reminder some drivers regard them with unjustified suspicion.

I spent a large part of my youth in the Linea, crossing the border, but I could never know it as well or as deeply as Lulú or some of the other vendors. Or rather, I could never know place as they do. While Lulú and I share an appreciation and love for the border, we arrived to this feeling from different directions, by literally walking along different paths and lines. It was by walking along these lines that we—along with many others—inscribed our lives into the Linea and made it real (Lee & Ingold, 2006, p. 77). “People not only move between places, but also form them by movement itself. By the interweaving of routes over time or concurrently, a place is made” (Lee & Ingold, 2006, p. 78). While we both made up

the Linea, it holds different meanings for Lulú and I because we inhabited the space differently—we moved around it and experienced it in entirely distinct ways.

As I mentioned before, Lulú took me on a walking tour when we first met so I could understand the border better. She understood the prejudices against the people who work there, but also the simple fact it can be a bewildering space. Walking around with me was a way of locating me—and a way of helping me locate myself—in the physical and social environment of the Linea. By walking around with me, she was simultaneously helping me find my bearings and sharing with me her mental image of the border, showing me or making ‘legible’ and ‘visible’ her conception of the place. Walking with me was Lulú’s way of telling me a story—her story.

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While Lynch describes this as legibility and visibility, de Certeau describes practices such as walking as the opposite<sup>10</sup>. Everyday “...practices organizing a bustling city [are] characterized by their blindness,” de Certeau argues (1980/2011, p.93). In his analysis of walking in the city as an enunciation and speech act, walking becomes a practice of absence—of what is no longer there but has left a trace<sup>11</sup>. Tracing city routes and paths, drawing trails on a map, makes movement visible (‘imageable’), but in doing so erases and makes invisible the practice of walking itself. On the other hand, walking as a practice of absence (a ‘blind’ practice) presents the opportunity to challenge dominant cartographic narratives, totalizing attempts at visibilization. We could never see, map, or know *everything*. In this sense, walking relates to imaginative, poetic, and oneiric functions. For de Certeau

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<sup>10</sup> Of course, Lynch and de Certeau had different theoretical backgrounds and agendas, but these apparently contradictory views signal a general difficulty with articulating the relationship between sensory embodied experience, translation of that experience, meaning, and power.

<sup>11</sup> “The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to statements uttered” (de Certeau, 1980/2011, p. 97). It should be noted walking in the countryside or in nature produces a different effect.

too then, dreams, myths, superstitions, memory, etc. also actively shape spaces. The practice of walking itself becomes a way of telling a story. Focusing only on material qualities and on conceptualizations of spaces detached from the everyday practices that take place in them is then not only limiting but also potentially oppressive. Though they employ opposite terms, Lynch shares a concerned interest for these intangible qualities of urban experience. His attempt at making the city legible is precisely rooted in a desire to make these aspects often ignored by city planners visible and to emphasize their importance. Lynch's notion of 'image' is a visualization of the everyday strangeness that can only "[outline] itself against the visible" (de Certeau, 1980/2011, p. 93). It addresses the space in-between what we see/cannot see, know/cannot know.

Creative practice tends to this issue as well, or, to recall an earlier discussion, creative practice happens in/as this "thirdspace" or "lived space" between the visible/invisible. Under this category I include not only art, but practices intended to generate or create something, as is sometimes the case with walking. Like Pabel's painting of the Linea, Lulu's walking with me, for example, was an attempt to share these immaterial (though also very palpable) aspects of the Linea experience. As I will discuss in the next section, this is what I also try to do with my camera. The medium and the act of filmmaking already play with these boundaries and so are well equipped to address them. Making film here then is my own attempt to make visible or conjure up some of these invisibilities.

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Merleau-Ponty's (1945/2012) phenomenological concept of embodiment focuses on the body in space. The body is the locus by and through which we engage the world. Bodies have the ability to incorporate cultural memory and history, so cultural memory itself can be embodied (Stoller, 1997). For its part, the quotidian—the small everyday occurrences and



practices that are the cornerstone of ethnographic work—and specifically the practice of walking, have the potential to deeply transform urban spaces (de Certeau, 1980/2011). The body here is not reduced to an object, a repository of cultural symbols and meanings, but is rather understood as an active producer and interpreter of phenomena. Body and place are interwoven in a kind of “meshwork” because we understand and make places through practice, by *doing* through the world (Ingold, 2000). This perception of place, Edward Casey (1996) explains, is simultaneously *constituted*, “by cultural and social structures seeded in the deepest level of perception,” and *constitutive*, which means we are able to influence and shape places even if we submit to them. Perception then, is always as embodied as it is emplaced. For these theorists, “we are not only *in* places but *of* them” (Casey, 1996). The paths people take and make as they move in the world and not simply their points of departure or destinations are important areas to examine in order to understand how people make meaning *of, with, and through* their environments (Feld & Basso, 1996; Casey, 1996). As Ingold and Verngunst (2008a) note, “It is along [the] ground, and not in some ethereal realm of discursively constructed significance, over and above the material world, that lives are paced out in their mutual relations” (p. 2).

The phenomenological perspective says that we not only perceive but come to know through—and because of—our bodies and senses. As an embodied practice that connects the self with the environment through movement, walking is then fundamental to our understanding of and our being in the world. Walking is crucial because we engage and understand our environment through our feet (Ingold, 2004). Sensing the ground and air around us is elemental to being ‘in touch’ with our surroundings. “The body itself is grounded in movement. Walking is not just what a body *does*; it is what a body *is*” (Ingold & Vergunst, 2008a, p. 2). By blurring the boundaries between the self and the environment as

we move, walking is both how we come to be and know places. Walking is thus an existential place-making practice. Lee and Ingold's (2006) work on the connection between walking and anthropological fieldwork describes how the locomotive aspect of walking helps us explore places successfully. "A place walked through is made by the shifting interaction of person and environment, in which the movement of the whole body is important rather than just an act of vision outwards from a fixed point. In walking we are on the move, seeing and feeling a route ahead of us and creating a path around and after us" (p. 68). Therefore, more than simply locomotive, "the movement of walking is a way of knowing" (Ingold & Vergunst, 2008a, p. 5).

Walking is also an essentially social activity; a person's movements respond to the environment including the people in it. We move according to all that is in a place—topography, weather, hidden or invisible rhythms, and other people. Furthermore, walking with people presents a particular way of being together. An empathic sociality comes about when we walk with others as we share in a "bodily engagement with the environment, the shared rhythm of walking" (Lee & Ingold, 2006, p. 79-80). Beyond any conversation that takes place, walking with often involves moving at the same pace and a mirroring the other's gestures. As Lee and Ingold (2006) elaborate:

People communicate through their posture in movement, involving their whole bodies. Crucially, walking side by side means that participants share virtually the same visual field. We could say that I see what you see as we go along together. In that sense I am with you in my movements, and probably in my thoughts as well. (p. 80)

Walking with requires attunement and awareness of the other's body in space, where this "sharing [of] a rhythm of movement is the basis for a shared understanding of each other"

(Lee & Ingold, 2006, p. 82). Walking with them is not only sharing an experience or experiencing together, but a way of learning about the other as you learn how to be with them in movement.

### **Walking (With a Camera)**

Part of my research involved “go-along” interviews (Kusenbach, 2003) with a video camera four months into my fieldwork. After establishing a relationship with people and learning a general sense of the ebbs and flows of the site, I presented myself with a camera. I filmed by myself, carrying a camera on a homemade ‘steadycam’ to be able to move with relative ease.

Go-along interviews involve shadowing subjects as they go about their day-to-day activities, asking questions about their tasks or environment when appropriate. According to Kusenbach (2003), go along interviews bypass the contrived nature of formal sit-down interviews that take subjects out of their natural environments. They also provide an opportunity for informants to comment or reflect on their own activities as they happen. This form of walking-along-with allows a more in-depth observation of people’s experience of their everyday social and physical environments and highlights how they move through the world.

The proposition of self-consciously shadowing individuals as they go about their business is very useful at the Linea. As I have mentioned, movement is not only an important facet of my conceptual framework (the movements of *revolver*), but also of—and because of—border vendors’ everyday lives. Their work involves hours of being on their feet, walking, running, or standing. Yet, their movement is not limited simply to work; their movements also include leisure activities. ‘Walking with’ in this context is an especially relevant tool for understanding vendors’ world-views.

Pink (2007) makes the case for “walking with video” as a method for generating and communicating an embodied and emplaced representation of people’s lives as the camera records subjects’ movements. While Pink’s examples center on ‘video tours,’ my walking with a camera does not involve planned expository excursions. Nevertheless, Pink’s explanation of the process of walking with a camera is relevant as it “...is itself a place-making process, and at the same time creates a filmic representation of place as made through film” (2007, p. 248). Walking with a camera, the act of filming, not only represents subject’s embodied practices in the world, but is itself an embodied ‘doing’ in the world, “a form of thinking through the body” (MacDougall, 1998, p. 49) that actively shapes experience. Hence, as a filmmaker I too am “making place” through the filmic encounter with subjects.

My filmmaking practice is thus a relational and participatory endeavor between the filmmaker and the film subjects and between the filmmaker and the filmic space (the filmmaker’s doing in the world). As MacDougall explains, “the camera [...] records the filmmaker’s movements and those of the film’s subjects in parallel. The image is affected as much by the body behind the camera as those before it” (2006, p. 27). The film *Todo lo que uno hace* (chapter 3) begins with a question I pose to Chaky, “What would happen [here]?” Before I turned on the camera, Chaky had begun lamenting how boring things were at the border, that day in particular, but also the past few weeks. CBP was remodeling the checkpoint, which had streamlined traffic and shortened car cues significantly, making it increasingly difficult to sell goods to people waiting in cars. I turn on the camera and frame him in a conventional interview frame. He begins recounting exciting past occurrences, situations he considers truly worthy of film. His descriptions sound like they are coming from Hollywood action movies or cop reality TV shows. I ask him follow up questions and

keep the frame tight on him. The camera is on him, prompting him to keep responding. Eventually his list ends, so I move back to open the frame and capture how there is no line anymore. The camera move makes Chaky start walking. Since he is no longer in the spotlight, he resumes his usual activities.

From the beginning, the sound of my voice brings to the fore my presence behind the camera. Commercial film relies on the invisibility of the camera; the viewer should not be aware of the camera, lest they are taken out of the story. The intention here is the opposite, as part of the story is the encounter between filmmaker and film subject in space. In this instance, I asked Chaky a question, he responded, I responded to his answers by moving the camera, and then Chaky responded to the camera's movements. This is a dialogue with words, but also between bodies in space, precipitated by the presence of a camera.

It is difficult to be fully aware of one's surroundings as a single person behind the camera. Most of the attention is focused on the image being recorded and anticipating the movements taking place in front of the camera. As a result, many subjects took as their job to warn me of potential hazards. As I filmed, I was routinely warned about moving cars, potholes, uneven ground, steps, etc. At times there is no warning, however, because either side of the camera is engaged in our respective practices, as when the motorhome hit Chaky's umbrella cart. The inherent danger of pedestrians and cars sharing the same space creates another level of complicity between film subject and filmmaker in this site, as we are both aware of and caring for each other's bodies in space.

MacDougall describes how often during the filmmaking process "the pleasure of filming erodes the boundaries between filmmaker and subject, between the bodies filmmakers see and the images they make" (2006, p. 27). This is what Jean Rouch (2003) experienced as *ciné-trance*, or a level of synchrony between his mind-body-camera and the

movements of his (often possessed) subjects that dissolved the border between the two. The point here is to highlight the ways the subject and filmmaker become entangled during the filmmaking process. Later, when viewing the film, the audience also becomes mixed up as they participate in the exchange that is taking place before their eyes. As we have seen, these relations are also enmeshed in space. According to Grimshaw and Ravetz, “the co-presence of filmmaker and subjects, the creation of shared time and space between them (coevalness), serves as the basis for creating a world for the viewer that has its own spatial and temporal coherence” (2009, p. 135). As we walk and film with a camera, we make the space of the film, while simultaneously making the physical space of the border. The filmmaking process by nature, then, *revuelve*, mixes up the relationships between people, as well as between people and place.

### *Volver a andar lo andado*

One definition of the word *revolver* is “*volver a andar lo andado*,” which more or less means “to walk what has been already walked” (Diccionario de la Real Academia Española, 2015). This “going down the same path” can be both metaphorical, as when one ruminates on something, as well as literal. It is by moving from place to place, along the lines in our lives that we gain knowledge of our environment and the world (Ingold, 2000, p. 227). And so returning to and walking those lines again, by ourselves and with others, means engaging in the kind of cyclical reflexivity involved in the border process and practice of *revolver*. Walking what has already been walked, what we have already walked ourselves, allows us to reflect on what has happened, what a place is, and who we are in it. Examining different scales of movement in *la Línea* allows us to better understand the ways movement and immobility become mixed-up, and how different mobilities also result in mix-ups across other borders.

At the same time, film as reflexive practice and as object shares some of the qualities of borders. Ethnographic filmmaking in particular is a participatory practice of representation that blends boundaries as it triangulates the exchange between filmmaker, subject, and viewer (MacDougall, 2006). One of the powers of the filmic image lies in the capacity of images to be highly specific while remaining ambiguous, what MacDougall describes as the “composite” quality of cinema—events and objects happening at the same time within an image (2006, p. 37). This quality allows us to investigate how people understand themselves and others in their environment in a way that writing does not permit (MacDougall, 2006, p. 38). In addition, both the filmic image and real life, like borders, exceed meaning because every image and experience is always more than what we are able to grasp, and so cannot be reduced or fixed to a particular conceptual or theoretical construct. Jackson elaborates:

To fully recognize the eventfulness of being is to discover that what emerges in the course of any human interaction overflows, confounds, and goes beyond the forms that initially frame the interaction as well as the reflections and rationalizations that follows from it. (2012, p. 255)

Filmmaking thus provides a way of addressing “the gap between what can be known and what remains emergent” (Grimshaw & Ravetz, 2009, xvii). That is to say, the act of filming is a reflexive analysis of the space between what we perceive and what we understand.

Filmmaking itself is a border(ed) practice that can attend to other borders, making it an exceptional medium for investigating the workings of liminal spaces.

A negotiator of sorts, the border spurs movement and rest, simultaneously inciting stagnation and potential. People wait in line and wait to make a sale, at times weary in the

monotony that is work, that is life. As the border represents an opportunity for a better life, waiting, like walking, becomes a way of being at the border.



## Chapter 5

### *Crossing with Evelyn*

Please see included video.

Please also see Appendix C for Evelyn's life story in her own words.

## Chapter 6

## Waiting: Crossers, Temporality, and the Rhythms of the Border

In this chapter, I set out to describe in detail the experience of crossing the Linea. “Border crossings” as critical identity shaping and subversive practices have been much discussed in Chicano literature (Lugo, 2000; Anzaldúa, 1987; Limón, 1994; Saldívar, 1997). Approached from the social sciences, work on crossings along the U.S.-Mexico border has focused on transnational migration, cross-border social networks, and ‘illegal’ journeys into the U.S. (Marquez & Romo, 2008; Overmyer-Velazquez, 2011; Schmidt Camacho, 2008; Segura & Zavella, 2007), as well as on localized movements between ‘sister’ border cities such as Tijuana-San Diego, Ciudad Juarez-El Paso, and Nogales-Nogales (Herzog, 1990; Martinez, 1994; McGuire, 2013; Ortiz-Gonzalez, 2003). Crossings along and beyond the border have also been analyzed according to state security and surveillance classificatory systems of illegality/legality and deportability (Cunningham & Heyman, 2004; De Genova, 2002; Heyman, 1999, 2004; Pallitro & Heyman, 2008; Talavera et al., 2010). On a more micro scale, daily ‘legal’ border crossings have been examined in relation to local economies of consumption (McCrossen, 2009; Murià Tuñón, 2010; Murià & Chavez, 2011), to the (re) production of distinct social categories and stratification across the border (Vila, 2000, 2003; Velasco Ortiz & Contreras, 2011; Vélez-Ibáñez, 1996; Yeh, 2017a), as well as livelihood strategies (Chavez, 2016, Velasco Ortiz, 2016). Border crossings are integral to discussions about border processes and dynamics on local and global levels and have been much referenced and discussed beyond the works I cite here. Nonetheless, the *experience of everyday* border crossing has not been examined in detail.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> To be sure, there are a few accounts of how people prepare to cross the border and individual stories recounting the ways the border has dramatically and mundanely shaped lives, but little insight into the

Perhaps our attention got caught noticing the movement and the privileges and advantages afforded by the ability to move across the border. Compared with illegal crossings (especially those taking place after the mid-90s)—which involve days of walking through harsh wilderness, abuse by smugglers, border patrol, *narcos* and others, and possible death—legal crossings are easy and much less risky. To be sure, visa holders and permanent residents face the risk of having their status revoked any time they cross the border, an increasingly common reality that produces much anxiety as losing access to the U.S. entails economic loss and precarity (Chavez, 2016; Velasco Ortiz, 2016). Even so, the experiences of ‘legal’ versus ‘illegal’ crossings remain very distinct. For U.S. citizens, who compose a minority of daily crossers, the danger of crossing is null. Moreover, for Mexican border residents, having access to the U.S. means access to a higher standard of living and class status. Thus, for those who are able to cross legally—those with privileged mobility—the border represents a place of opportunity and possibility. Although, as already mentioned, for visa holders and others, this sense of opportunity is increasingly defined by the threat of its absence.

Not only do daily border crossings involve less or no danger and can provide great affordances, they are also mundane compared with illegal crossings. Legal crossings through U.S. Ports of Entry represent the vast majority of northbound traffic. While regular movement from one country to another (especially in cases where the two locations are distinct and unequal) attracts attention due to the particular social configurations it produces, the act itself appears irrelevant, boring, or superfluous. What seems to matter most is either what prompts and/or results from the movement, that is, the transformations that take place upon moving from point A to B (and, more often than not, back again). This vision

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experience of crossing itself. See for example, Velasco Ortiz and Contreras’ (2014) wonderful arrangement of life stories according to a typology that tries to capture ‘different ways of experiencing the border.’

conflates the outcome of movement with the practice of moving, thereby ignoring the work it takes to move. It also separates and subsumes physical movement under what become the abstracted motivations and outcomes that produced it or that it produced. The effect is the same either way: the body that moves across the border disappears and the work of moving becomes invisible.

Only recently have scholars begun to consider the liminal period associated with travel and commuting as worthy of study (Bisell, 2014; Edensor, 2011; Sheller and Urry, 2006). A growing interest on mobilities of slowness and waiting, as well as boredom and “dead” time is perhaps a response to the emphasis placed on speediness and acceleration in earlier studies of globalization and modern capitalism. Not to mention the ways everyday life continues to feel exponentially hasty, dominated by labor, and saturated by and with everything, leaving us stunned. Our sense of time and space is continually morphing in ways that are difficult to describe or explain.

Harvey’s sense of “time-space compression” appears to have simultaneously produced an expansion. Or as Lefebvre previously noted, capitalism abstracts time as much as space in such a way that disruptions to biological and earthly rhythms become normalized. A quick unrelated example: the elite classes’ rhetoric of “wellness” and “self-care” that hinges on slowness (encouraging the individual to pause, take breaks, consume ‘slow’ food, etc.) has been incorporated into a broader neoliberal discourse of individual freedom and responsibility in caring for the body in order to improve its productive capabilities to both consume and accumulate capital more effectively. This simultaneously elevates the value of leisure-personal time over labor time presenting it as the antidote to work, while disguising the mechanisms through which the leisure-personal is also transformed into labor. That is to say, our usual assumption of slowness as a subversive tactic in the context of speed-centered

capitalist, market time no longer suffices. As others have also urged, we need to think about time differently. Just as the materialist approach to borders emphasizes the visible and concrete in the face of increasingly diversified and invisible state surveillance and control mechanisms, studies of mobility and time also begin to highlight situations of stasis, stuckness, and slowness in the context of modern capitalism.

Focusing on the experience of daily border crossers in the Linea reveals prolonged, habitual waiting as its crucial defining characteristic. Anthropological studies on waiting have focused primarily on ‘third world’ bureaucracies in the neoliberal economic context, discussing the forced waiting they produce as a function of a disciplinary state that aims to control subjects’ time and agency, as well as waiting as a possible site for sociality and resistance (Auyero, 2012; Doughty, 2017; Harms, 2013; Gupta, 2012; Mathur, 2014). Studies on waiting and borders have centered on migration—the ways state control over migrants’ mobility affects their experience of time. Specifically, this work has focused on the ways detention facilities, deportation, and visa and asylum application procedures create liminal juridical-political categories of legality/illegality that also exercise power over vulnerable migrant populations through uncertainty and indefinite waiting (Hass 2017; Conlon, 2011; Griffiths, 2014)—temporalities that are often intertwined with particular configurations of capitalist consumption and production (Andersson, 2014). Relatedly, the majority of the recent literature on borders examines how state security and surveillance measures are intertwined with neoliberal capitalism, leading to restricted and differentiated mobility, which is increasingly studied through a biopolitical lens (Amoore, 2006; Amoore et al., 2008; Cunningham & Heyman, 2004; Salter, 2013; Sparke, 2005; Murphy and Maguire, 2015).

Therefore, with few exceptions, and despite the call to move beyond spatialities and examine the changing relations between temporalities and power produced by and through

borders (Axelsson, 2013; Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013), border studies literature continues to examine power and inequality primarily through a mobilities framework that carries an explicit or implicit spatial bent. Despite (or perhaps because of) the proximity between migration and border studies and their shared focus on mobility, these emerging emphases on time and space, respectively, have not been in much communication. This again is due to issues of scales, our spatial-temporal imagination (where and how we imagine the border), and our perhaps inevitable bias towards the aberrant and extraordinary. The anthropological project is unequivocally positioned to link individual and collective spheres, but the more distance we keep from everyday embodied experience changes what we notice. This is not to say that a phenomenological perspective is the best and only way to approach anything or everything (though there has also been increasingly more interest in this approach). I'm simply trying to figure out how it's possible to have such in-depth analysis on various configurations of mobility, time, space, everyday practice, capitalism, the state, borders, power, and more, and a vast literature on border crossings between the U.S. and Mexico specifically, without much focus on what it *feels* like to cross the border 'legally,' as tens of thousands of people do every single day. Focusing on this particular experience, presents a way of bringing all of the areas of study together.

I propose that examining how people wait in line to cross the border reveals the ways contemporary state security and capitalism come together to produce spatiotemporal inequality and disciplining. Like previous studies on waiting, I too discuss this experience as a disciplinary state practice aimed at creating obedient bodies. But as the literature on securitization, surveillance, and biometric classifications show, state power at the border relies not only on the criminalization of bodies, but on controlling the mobility of entire populations and the spatiotemporal environment where such movement takes place. The

border thus represents a “crossroads” of sovereign, disciplinary, and bio-power (Nail, 2013). This manifests synergistically at the Linea through checkpoint architecture, panoptic surveillance, and CBP agents’ behavior, all of which serve to foster both a carceral atmosphere and a backdrop of fear and uncertain but imminent threat. The time of security is urgent and cyclical (requiring periodic and regular maintenance) as the state is forced to prepare for infinitely possible but indeterminate threats (Amoore, 2013; Holbraad and Pedersen, 2013; Masco, 2014). In this way, state security imperatives not only justify, but simultaneously reinforce and are reinforced by a carceral atmosphere that presumes culpability. Thus, in this context, border crossers are not only controlled through classificatory biometric “risk-threat” schemes that criminalize their bodies and determine who and how they can move across the border, as has already been noted (Amoore, 2006; Muria and Chavez, 2011; Heyman, 1999; Pallitro & Heyman, 2008), but also through bodily confinement in the form of excessive habitual waiting—a disciplinary strategy that is justified and normalized precisely by this imagination of a state under permanent threat.

Furthermore, state and capitalist power is intertwined at the border. The combined impulses of state securitization restriction and capitalist economic freedom result in a double logic of slowness and speed. This double logic is notably evidenced in the concurrent creation of two types of programs after 9/11: the “Smart Border” programs aimed at facilitating the movement of a “business class” elite, and their exclusionary counterpart of “expedited removal” or deportation of unwanted migrants (Sparke, 2006). Smart Border programs at border checkpoints in particular result in differentiated and unequal mobilities that are not dependent exclusively on citizenship, but rather rely on measurements of subjects’ security “risk” (Pallitro and Heyman, 2008). This “biometric border” segregates movements into “legitimate” mobilities, tied to business or leisure, and “illegitimate”

mobilities, having to do with trafficking, terrorism, etc. (Amoore, 2006). The issue is that these categories increasingly result in the criminalization of legal crossings. As Muria and Chavez (2011) have noted, in Tijuana these distinctions have gradually led to the narrow differentiation of all crossers into either privileged “consumers” or criminal “workers.”<sup>2</sup> As Nail (2006) explains, “Modern borders are the modulation and management of these two kinds of flows: securitized flows to be slowed and detained, and economic flows to be sped up and facilitated” (p. 219). In the end, all of these programs and procedures are oriented towards these two temporal logics of slowness and speed that may appear to be conflict, but in fact serve the broader border function of circulation (the evil side of *revolver*).

Therefore, these associations between state-slowness and capitalist-speed in fact merge at the border, as both function simultaneously and support one another, forming a kind of “chiasm.” Furthermore, these intertwining logics manifest differently and can also be observed at the scale of the body, in the bodies of people waiting in line. The notion of abstracted capitalist time is at work here. This imagination of a market time where capital can be infinitely accumulated denies the reality of human finitude and ambiguity, and makes the time of labor invisible. Through this abstraction, “time is stripped of its meaning in order to make it a technique for assessing our worth according to market criteria and to accrue capital” (Bear, 2016, p. 492). Thus, the labor of crossing the border is erased. As an informant remarked, crossing the border is “going to work before going to work.” Note he

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<sup>2</sup> To recall, workers are criminalized at the Linea as CBP increasingly cracks down on the historical and widespread practice of visa-holding Tijuana residents unlawfully working in San Diego.

<sup>3</sup> Public transit in Tijuana consists of route buses and “taxis”—vans holding 7-12 people. Both stop to pick up or drop off at almost any street corner along the route.

<sup>4</sup> This double booth construction was part of the first phase of the checkpoint renovation project that began in 2013, and was expected to reduce wait times by 30 percent. The second booths were only briefly used after they were inaugurated in late 2014, and reduced the line to almost zero. Vendors were desperate and scared. However, there weren’t enough agents to permanently staff the new construction. We are back to single booths and the wait time is back to the usual “at least two hours.”

<sup>5</sup> Story goes a very happy dog was carrying a sandwich when he walked by a river. He looked down at the water and confused his reflection with another dog. He barked at this stranger dog, demanding he give him his sandwich so he could have two, but as soon as he did, he dropped his own in the river and was left with



doesn't say "it's like" going to work, he describes crossing *as work* in of itself. The erasure of the work in waiting is the result of "dispossession of the body" brought about by the entangled disciplining of both capitalism and the state. This work invisibility is also a time invisibility that hides how the crosser's desire for speed—and the clash between this urgency and the slowness and unpredictability encountered at the border—are both informed and determined by the state and capitalism in various ways. From this perspective, the temporalities and rhythms of the Linea manifest power.

To further examine this relation between state and capitalist time and power, I will use Lefebvre's (1992/2004) framework of "rhythmanalysis." This method helps to study different scales of time (calendar-work-time, lunar, somatic, mechanical, etc.), accounts for space, and is also concerned with phenomenological experience and the senses. This framework presents an understanding of space as processual—in the process of becoming—but also as somewhat stabilized by the repetition of rhythmic temporal patterns that circularly run through it. By describing and analyzing the experience of waiting in line, we can therefore get a sense of how normative and disruptive rhythms and temporalities become entangled, making up space of the Linea.

The rest of this chapter is divided into two sections. The first section presents two accounts of border crossing. One is written in first person, taken from my field notes one morning I crossed the border on foot with two friends, Tito and Damian, local musicians who work and study in San Diego. They were part of a larger group of commuter border crossers I would later interview, whose perspectives and reflections form the basis for section two of this chapter. The other account is written in second person as I attempted to describe the social space and various actors of *la Línea* from the perspective of a driver. This

text is based on conversations with border crossers, general observations, and on my personal experience crossing the border these last few years.

The second section is organized around key themes raised in focus group discussions where participants discussed their experiences of crossing the border. This section concludes with a rhythm analysis of border crossing in an attempt to make the ‘invisible’ and powerful rhythms and temporalities of the border ‘visible.’ I interviewed six people who cross the border regularly (three to seven days a week) twice as a group, for a total of close to six hours on the topic of border crossing. These crossers are between the ages of 21 and 40, and all work and/or go to school in San Diego. While the majority of people crossing the Linea hold visas, with one exception, all of the people I interviewed are U.S. citizens living in Tijuana. Four of them grew up along the border region, living in both Mexico and the U.S. or only in Mexico, while the other two are recent transplants. One is a Mexican woman; the others are men, one of whom is white; five of the subjects are Mexican. Therefore, with the exception of the U.S. permanent resident, this group faces no risks when crossing the border due to their U.S. citizenship, representing a privileged minority of people crossing the border every day.

While the stakes are different depending on your status and border crossing strategies vary accordingly especially in preparation to interact with CBP agents, my focus on the experience of waiting *revuelve* or mixes up these categories. From a phenomenological perspective what matters most is *how you cross*—if you cross by foot, by car, or motorcycle and the *papeles* (papers, documents) you carry. This means that the usual categories of crosser/non-crosser and the categories within the umbrella of ‘legal’ crosser—the U.S. citizen, the permanent resident, the visa holder—are more diverse than they appear at first. For example, the U.S. citizen who crosses by foot with a birth certificate and I.D. will have

to wait longer and will generally have a more difficult experience compared with a visa holder who crosses by car with an elite “Sentri” pass. Therefore, as CBP sells different modalities of crossing to foment faster economic flows, class, ‘legal’ statuses and the privileges these afford become intertwined in distinct and unexpected ways. As I’ve already mentioned, border scholars have explained this through a mobilities framework that criminalizes some and foments social stratification, here I add to this by emphasizing the temporal rather than spatial quality of these movements. In the context of the Linea, then, growing inequality between border crossers also manifests through a spectrum of waiting, where waiting remains the key disciplining strategy for all.

### **Part One: Crossing the Border**

#### **On Foot**

The day started at 5:30 a.m. No, the day started when I woke up at 5:00 a.m. Maybe it started the night before when I set my alarm clock and counted the few hours I was going to sleep. For me crossing the border has always involved day-before preparations, or at least the thought of them, so yes, the days I cross the border actually begin the day before as I mentally prepare for the journey. Tito and Damian knocked on my door at 5:30 a.m., exactly as planned. I hadn’t expected them to be on the dot. Nobody in this town ever is; being on time means being at least ten minutes late. While I finished packing my bag Damian complained Tito didn’t let him drink coffee. Tito reminded Damian he was free to do whatever he wanted. I told them I could make us all coffee but Tito said we should get going to the border. When we arrived to the corner at the end of my street where the taxis pass,<sup>3</sup> we checked the clock and Tito said it was okay for us to buy coffee at the nearby *Oxxo*

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<sup>3</sup> Public transit in Tijuana consists of route buses and “taxis”—vans holding 7-12 people. Both stop to pick up or drop off at almost any street corner along the route.

(convenience store chain) because the Facebook group “*Como esta la Línea*” (How is the line)—which he checked right before leaving his house—said there was no line.

“*No hay fila* (there’s no line), so we can take more time,” Tito said twice as if to convince himself, as we walked to the Oxxo to order coffee through a tiny window. That Oxxo is open 24 hours, but the door was still closed from the night before.

We’re in the middle of adding creamer to our coffees when the empty taxi arrives and we pile inside. The taxi rapidly fills while we chat about old friendships, meth and other drugs that prompt schizophrenia in certain people.

We arrive to downtown quickly (ten minutes) and walk a block to take another bus to the Línea. I step in first to the blasting sound of *corridos* and make the mistake of asking the driver how much it costs. I get charged eleven pesos instead of ten. “They raised the prices,” Tito would later explain to me, “but I still always give them ten.” I’d noticed he’d done just that when he stepped in, while I stood there counting my coins like a rookie. The driver said nothing to him. So I asked the driver, “Why not ten?” but the music was too loud or he pretended not to hear me and I didn’t press the matter further. “Sometimes they do ask me for the extra peso, but I just wait for them to ask for it,” Tito said later. It takes less than five minutes to get to the border from downtown by car, versus twenty minutes of walking. It’s a very short ride. The one peso raise feels like a rip off to everyone, another instance of bus drivers bullying passengers because local and state governments are bullying them. But that’s Mexico—blatant and conspicuous in its expression of the tyrant chain, with the most disenfranchised people at the bottom and corrupt politicians with their corporate cronies at the top. Nobody is fooling anybody, but here, everyone still plays his part. I play mine: feeling embarrassed and outraged about the extra peso and doing nothing about it.

We arrive at the border and quickly walk across a bridge that sits above the car traffic. It's 6:30 a.m. All of the bus and taxi pick up and drop off points have changed again since the previous pedestrian exit was moved. They're now all at the end of where the pedestrian line forms, at the bottom of the bridge, a steady flow of people and cars moving in all directions. While we're still walking across the bridge, Tito looks past all of the idling cars to where the pedestrian line is and declares, "There's no line." We slow our stride. He recalls how once he was in such a hurry crossing this bridge, looking at the line as he was now, that he tripped and landed on his brow. "I didn't notice they had closed off this pedestrian path," he says pointing at an abandoned ramp. He briefly blacked out, noticed all of the blood, decided to cross and go to work anyway, but later changed his mind and went to the hospital instead. Tito got four stitches for looking at the Linea.

*Todavía no hay fila* (there's no line yet). "That means I get to eat!" cries Damian. "Usually the line is past the second pharmacy," Tito says, "and it takes about two hours to cross." Damian had crossed two days before and Tito five days before and both said it was much longer then. Tito apologizes to me about the short line, which everyone immediately admits is a strange thing to do. He jokes saying he'd actually been lying all along about how long it gets. We keep walking.

There are three signs hanging overhead, with bilingual captions, signaling where one should stand depending on your papers. "The distinctions between Ready Lane and the regular line don't matter until you're inside," Tito notes. Outside the lanes move at the same speed, but once inside the building, the Ready Lane moves much faster.

We walk over the painted line on the ground marking the official U.S.-Mexico political divide and reach the gate that sits before the immigration and customs building. There are three security guards off to the side on the other side of the gate, engaged in a

lively discussion. “*Ya no son migra* (They’re no longer customs agents),” Tito points out, “They’re wearing a different uniform.” CBP has apparently outsourced some jobs to a security company. We go through the revolving metal door. “This is where people start running. The officers [security guards] don’t give a fuck,” says Damian, “And it’s somehow okay to cut to the front if you run, it’s completely acceptable. See that little ledge there? People sometimes run on top of that to cut each other off.” We walk into metal dividers that lead up to the building, dividing what is now imaginary traffic into four categories. “These are new,” I note. “Yeah, they’re really controlling the traffic now,” says Tito. “I told you we’re like cattle!” Damian blurts out. “One time when I was crossing with Evelyn, she stopped to help an old woman who had fallen down because she had been running. As soon as Evelyn helped her back up, she just left and kept on running! Didn’t even say thank you,” Damian recounts.

As we enter the building, a disheveled white man in his 40s is walking in the opposite direction screaming out on repeat: “I’m going to kill the Negro in charge. I’m going to kill Barack Obama.” Tito and Damian agree that he’s yelling so *they* (CBP) will hear him. The Yelling White Man is prodding them. There are cameras and microphones everywhere, they assure me. Damian explains, “These white people are so privileged they think they can come up to the front and just cut in line. It never crosses their mind they also need to wait like everybody else.”

We finally arrive to the end of the line and wait. The regular lane is moving slowly. This is what happens, they say, when the line is short, it moves more slowly. They point to the wall on the left. Sometimes there’s a bunch of women and children sitting along this wall. They’re mostly from Central America, but sometimes you see people from Africa. They’re applying for refugee status. They have to wait there for *hours*. They can’t use the bathroom or

eat, can't go anywhere. They're just stuck. And those guys (CBP) don't care, Tito and Damian say.

We inch along. “*Ya valimos* (we're screwed). Secondary,” says Tito, “We're not going to move until he comes back.” The agent had just gotten up to lead the couple he was speaking with to another booth in the back. Tito had been keeping an eye on our future agent and his interactions with everyone in a fruitless, but automatic attempt to figure out just how long it was going to take to cross.

“*No hay humanidad; son robots y nosotros somos ganado* (There's no humanity; they're robots and we're cattle),” declares Damian. He's referring to the perceived heartlessness of CBP agents and the monotony of their jobs. “They don't care, they don't see us as people any more, there's just too many of us.” They mention stories of older CBP agents complaining about how the younger ones *no aguantaban* (didn't tolerate) the twelve hour shifts...It's hard work. And it's repetitive. And boring. The younger ones would quit.

Damian: They (CBP) get so tired and jaded, their brain stops working well and it makes them not be able to judge if someone is a real threat or not...other times they're just angry and take it out on you. They took my dad's Senti away because he smiled at the officer. Really. That was the reason. When my dad came up to him he smiled and the guy found my dad's behavior suspicious. “That's why you have to be quiet and say what they want to hear,” Tito responds, “They're like dogs. If you're afraid, they'll know. If you're mellow, they'll let you go.”

The Yelling White Man is back with snacks in his mouth and hand. He cut to the front and is being questioned by a CBP officer. He's not yelling anymore. We wonder if they will let him through. Damian jokes that one day he's going to snap like the Yelling White

Man, screaming at all of the other Mexicans waiting in line around us, “*Somos ganado! Somos ganado! Muuuu!* (We’re cattle! We’re cattle! Mooooo!)”

“I’m trying to think if there’s anything good about *la Línea*,” Damian continues, “but, no, there isn’t.” Tito tells the story of his mom asking an officer what the situation was with the new but unused double booths in the car lanes<sup>4</sup>. “The guy said—*bien cínico* (all cynical)—‘Oh, those are just for show.’” “So there *is* show going on!” Damian cries out.

We talk about the chips in the fancy new cards required to use the Ready Lanes. The faster speed of these Lanes is meant to encourage people to switch over to the new system. But a lot of people can’t afford or don’t have the right papers or the time or the *ganas* (desire, want) to get the new cards. Tito and Damian think these cards are “just for show” too, the newest “gadget.” Like these kiosks that are in front of us, they have been out of service forever, they say. They installed these so people would scan their documents, then stand on whatever one of these worn out stickers on the ground the machine told you to go to, giving the officer all of your information before you walked up to him. But people didn’t know how to use them. You had old people trying to insert their documents, making the machine glitch constantly, so we ended up going back to the old tried-and-true system. Now these expensive machines are just standing here unused.

All of this technology is supposed to *agilizar el cruce* (make crossing faster), but it’s all just wasteful, it’s “just for show”. It’s wasteful because they (CBP) get funds they *have to* spend on “protecting” the border. Also, Americans love gadgets and spending money on technology, even when they know it won’t work in the long run because *mexas* (Mexicans)

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<sup>4</sup> This double booth construction was part of the first phase of the checkpoint renovation project that began in 2013, and was expected to reduce wait times by 30 percent. The second booths were only briefly used after they were inaugurated in late 2014, and reduced the line to almost zero. Vendors were desperate and scared. However, there weren’t enough agents to permanently staff the new construction. We are back to single booths and the wait time is back to the usual “at least two hours.”



won't ever learn how to use it or adapt to it because it's just not efficient or makes no sense in this context. All of this useless technology is purchased simply to justify budget expenses. The only thing being 'secured' is next year's budget. The security gadgets are "just for show." "But the show must go on," Damian concludes.

I begin listing in my mind all of the different "gadgets" I can remember encountering in my life time: retinal scans, weight sensors, X-ray machines, car-sized X-ray machines, gate-kiosk hybrids, metal detectors, mirrors, screwdrivers, and that furtive red flashing machine nobody knows the purpose of but is rumored to give you cancer. Where does this so-high-tech-it's-unusable technology end up? Where do border gadgets go to die? I imagine new machines on top of newer still wrapped in plastic machines locked up inside a generic storage unit off of the highway that would be sold to a reality TV bidder if it weren't actually sitting on top of a huge floating dump in the middle of the Pacific.

We instinctively stop talking. We're up next. Tito goes first. He seems a bit nervous, but passes through after little questioning. Damian plays it cool and also goes through with no problem. It's my turn and I'm nervous. I wonder why Tito and I, being U.S. citizens, are nervous. We're doing nothing illegal, our citizenship can't be revoked. But the entire process and atmosphere is one of the bare bulb, dark room, sitting across from interrogating shadows variety. As a friend from the U.S. South noted after his first time crossing, "It's like you're in jail. They make you feel like you're guilty, like you've done something wrong, and they're just trying to figure out what it is you're hiding so they can charge you after the fact." The uniformed man waves me over. He's young and has a remarkably mean, no-nonsense face. I say hello and he stares at me blankly. I hand him my passport. He scans it. He holds it up in front of his eyes and next to my face. Where are you going? San Diego. What are you bringing? Nothing. He hands back my passport and I pass through. I look for Tito and

Damian but they're nowhere to be seen. As I line up again to pass my book bag through the X-ray machine I remember they have no bags on them and so are expected to leave the building immediately. There's a battered sheet of plexi glass attached at the other end of the conveyor belt. It's meant to keep people from reaching too far into the machine when they pick up their bags. It barely succeeds as everyone crowds on top of each other, reaching for their bags over the tall glass as soon as they come out.

I walk outside and notice that the lone security man next to the building is not wearing a CBP uniform. I find Tito and Damian waiting outside and suddenly remember the Yelling White Man! I'd lost track of him in the heat of it all. Two days later I would find out Yelling White Man did make it across because he made a bomb threat in the trolley my friend Evelyn had been riding, making some passengers panic and others wish he hadn't been lying after having to wait around for two hours while the police investigated. "He wasn't even wearing a shirt! Where would he be hiding a fucking bomb?" Evelyn would later remark.

It's 7 a.m. It took us half an hour to cross. Tito doesn't have to work until 9am so we walk to a nearby IHOP to have breakfast. Every time I cross, Tito says, I look back at Tijuana from here and see the *Arco* (arch, Tijuana landmark) *y no siento que estoy en San Diego* (I don't feel like I'm in San Diego). *Es que ya no voy más norte y aquí hay puro mexicano* (It's because I don't travel further up north anymore and it's full of Mexicans here). It's like TJ, just cleaner.

I look at the *Arco*. It's true. It's the same people, the same people on both sides, like us, we're here now and we're there later. San Ysidro, the neighborhood right across the border where Tito works and where I went to school, feels like an extension of Tijuana. It feels like the majority of the people that work or shop at this mall and most of the people I

went to school with also live in Tijuana. South San Diego *is* full of Mexicans and *tijuanenses*. And San Diego is very segregated. Drop a Mexican in the richest and whitest part of town up north and you'll see how uncomfortable everyone will be, especially the Mexican.

I look at the *Arvo* and think how intriguing it is that for us two cities in two countries can feel like one. I remember wondering during a Christmas visit with my extended family how it was that I managed to 'make sense' there, in a small desert border town in Sonora with my *Mexnex* cousins, and also 'make sense' in Rhode Island next to my ritzy private school classmates. I may not have fit in in either place, but I was still able to navigate and carve out a space for myself in these disparate social worlds, and this was all because of the border.

I look at the *Arvo* and at downtown Tijuana, and Tijuana is still on the other side of all of those metal walls and fences. Tijuana is dirtier than "America's Finest City" like Tito said, but it also just looks and feels completely different than San Diego. They're in very different countries. And while many cross the border daily, most can't cross and don't share this sense of continuity Tito describes because the border is not open for them. Border movement can be a mirage, it can induce fictive visions.

But Tito, Damian, and I navigate and experience the border as a place that extends beyond the line on both sides. And for people with such mobility what's most important about the border is how fast it can be moved through. As we left the *Arvo* behind Tito reminded me, "*Te toco suerte, no había fila*" (You got lucky, there wasn't any line).

### **By Car**

You drive up to that street corner in downtown Tijuana with one of the most frustrating traffic lights in the city. It's one of those lights that lasts an eternity and then is only green for half a second, making it a street that is always full of idling cars. There is a

soup kitchen on this street, the “Desayunador del Padre Salvador.” The majority of people who eat there live on the street, have drug-addiction problems, and are Mexican men who have been deported from the U.S. Most mornings you can find five to seven young men carrying squeegees and reused Coke bottles attempting to clean your windshield for change. They are relentless and rarely take no for an answer.

A space clears and you drive up to the front. They direct you emphatically, pointing in the direction of the lane that would lead you to the border. They don’t do this with everyone and you wonder what about you makes them assume you’re trying to cross the border, or, as they say, “return to the U.S.” Is it the California license plates? Your light skin? Is it your clothing or sunglasses? But none of these elements alone preclude a different conclusion. Maybe it’s your composite image, the general *feel* you give off, just as you looked back at these men walking away from the moving traffic and quickly decided they were recently deported from the U.S.

These men are there ready to clean your car and serve as guides because arriving at the correct lane to cross the border is near impossible unless you already know your way around the city. The kind of document you hold determines the lanes you are supposed to use to cross the border. Do you have an American passport? A passport card? A “green card”? A border resident card visa? Border checkpoints you’ve encountered when you’ve traveled abroad by plane usually divide people up into nationals or foreigners. This is not the case here. The differences lie in how high-tech your *papeles* (papers) are or how much money you paid for them, but more on this later. The point is that the different border crossing lanes are only accessible from particular points in the city. There are six entry points, and like many other things in Tijuana, the roads leading up to them are confusing to reach. In

Tijuana, nothing is labeled until it's too late and any road sign you might find is a riddle. And so these men offer themselves as human GPSs for your spare change.

The border checkpoint is an ever-changing traffic jam of sorts with tentacles spreading out in various directions. Choosing the correct point of entry is the first step to ensure a streamlined border crossing experience. If you make a mistake at this stage, you can expect to be chastised or sent to secondary inspection by a CBP agent. And time is of the essence. Picking the *right* lane—meaning, the fastest—is key.

You turn left, finally, after getting cut off and having to cut someone else off yourself. You've come to terms with having to ignore street signs to move; offensive driving keeps other cars from constantly overstepping their boundaries, i.e. getting in your way. You generally cross through what are now called “general traffic” lanes, or more often, *carriles normales* (normal lanes), those reserved for “normal” people. Not too long ago, these lanes were broadly referred to as the *lado izquierdo* (left side) due to geography: the curios market near the checkpoint divided up all lanes in half. Now the crossing lanes are divided into “general traffic,” “Ready Lanes,” “Sentri,” and “Fast Pass Lane” (a.k.a. “Medical lane”).

You stay left and line up behind the longer of two lines of cars then you look at your watch, making a mental note of the time: 9:10 a.m. To the untrained eye choosing the longer line makes no sense. But you know that from this particular entry point at this distance, the left lane will eventually open up to more lanes and is unburdened by the possibility of other cars cutting in line and the slow merging of lanes from another nearby entry point. Be wary of short lines, you were taught. If “the line” was shorter, deciding which lane to pick would be more agonizing because picking the *right* lane would be less simple. Everyone has their own method of choosing: picking the one that moves first; if cars behind you don't get angry, hovering at the end waiting to see which moves the fastest; or simply having the

resolve to never change lanes no matter what. Everyone swears by his or her personal crossing methods, but it's always a gamble, something out of your control. As a crosser, your main objective is to minimize the time spent at the border. After all, it's simply the thing keeping you from your very important business of going to work, to school, or to shop at Wal-Mart. Though there are those rare moments when you don't mind spending more time there, like that time you crossed at 4 a.m. and there was no line, and you stopped your car in the middle of the street to order a *machaca* (shredded beef) burrito and *champurrado* (hot corn drink) for breakfast from that kind no-nonsense woman.

But usually all questions about the border revolve around one thing: time. *How many cars/people are there?* From that number one begins to estimate how long the wait will be based on past experience, although estimates are not always right. 200 *peatones* (pedestrians) equals two hours. Forty cars can mean twenty minutes or one hour. 300 cars, two to three hours. 1,000 *peatones* once also meant two hours. So people also ask, *is it going fast or slow?* Local radio stations on both sides of the border offer border-crossing information during their traffic announcements. Tijuana radio stations' traffic updates report solely on the number of cars at each crossing checkpoint; there's no information about other streets or highways. The regional telephone company *Telnor* has a special number one can call to get border numbers that are updated every fifteen minutes. But currently the most up to date information can be found online, in a Facebook group called "*Como está la línea?*" (How is the line?), where members post photos and mention where they found the line, using landmarks. "It's up to the car dealership," or, "It's by the Medical Lane booth." Or they may ask, "how is the Ready Lane?" Sometimes they also post 'shame' photos of the car that just cut them off, of lost documents, of exchange rates, of how much a gallon of gas costs in San Diego. Knowing how long the line is is useful if you don't cross regularly or have some flexibility

about what days or at what time you cross the border. But for those that cross the border at the same time every day, checking this information is simply habit, you want to know what to expect. Like getting ready to confront the asshole at work or the unruly child or the protesting parent. *Como está?* Is she bad, is she good? Is he happy, is he sad? Is she feeling generous or is he being an idiot? A capricious, narcissistic *Línea* demanding we ask each other every day, at all hours—*how are they doing?*—in preparation for our unavoidable encounter.

The line is moving steadily. It's been twenty minutes and you're almost past the initial U-shaped turn. You've covered twenty yards. There are hardly any more window washers; now you're beginning to see men carrying blankets, and "Aztec" calendars and ceramic deer. The window washers aren't allowed to travel too far "down," that is, north and closer to the inspection booths. They will be chased out or even beaten if they do. The unionized and more established workers don't like them around. "*Dan mala imagen,*" vendors say, "they present a bad image. Then people start confusing us with them, saying we steal, that we're all *malandros* (thugs)."

You mindlessly change the radio station. Your line stopped moving. You look to the right and make a note of the car that you were paired with before this happened. If that red Chevy moves forward too quickly you know what to do. A man passes by selling *churros*. You wonder why the line stopped. You look at the clock; you've been in the same spot for seven minutes. The red Chevy is four cars ahead. The Ford in front of you anxiously steps off their brakes, moving forward a few inches. You copy them. The Chevy is now six cars ahead. You consider changing lanes but notice that despite its progress, the Chevy lane isn't moving very fast. You know that if you were to change lanes, your new lane would likely become the slowest one.

One of the cars ahead of you thinks differently and unsuccessfully swerves violently, attempting to change lanes. The threatened driver keeps moving forward but the defector car insists by inching into the right lane again. The other cars in the lane are now alerted, however, and go around the defector. If the defector is not careful, they could end up in the middle of two lanes, *como el perro de las dos tortas* (like the dog with the two sandwiches).<sup>5</sup> Your lane starts moving all of a sudden. You push the accelerator; the defector car quickly rejoins the group and moves forward. You hit the breaks. You're on the bridge so the initial two lanes have now become five. You're now only two cars behind the Chevy. You relax a bit.

There's a young woman outside the passenger side window selling all kinds of chips and candy on a cart. She's on her phone. A young man walks up to her and they start chatting. They're flirting so you start eavesdropping but can't hear anything. You lower your window a bit. It's very sunny, but under her big hat she's wearing long sleeves. They sell protective sleeves at the border too, the texture of thick pantyhose printed in your choice of ugly tattoos. The sun here burns—it's not like other suns, it doesn't help plants grow. This is a desert sun, forever demanding a fine balance of its destructive and generative powers. It will kill you if don't hide from it or use it. A man walks by with a mountain of hats on his head, toy guitars, and a Tonalá vase and cups set. A neighboring car waves him over. You hear a man's voice in the distance, *Quiero vendeer!* (I want to sell). You wonder what he's trying to sell. The Tonalá vase and cup set are being inspected as the man with a mountain of hats speaks emphatically. "You want them to hold it," veteran vendors say, "so they feel like it belongs to them already." Money is exchanged. I guess the tactic works. *Quiero vendeer!*

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<sup>5</sup> Story goes a very happy dog was carrying a sandwich when he walked by a river. He looked down at the water and confused his reflection with another dog. He barked at this stranger dog, demanding he give him his sandwich so he could have two, but as soon as he did, he dropped his own in the river and was left with nothing.



passes by carrying homemade flour tortillas. You wonder if you're hungry. The young man walks away to a neighboring cart and the young woman returns to her phone with her long sleeves.

You've inched your way to the beginning of the curios market. Rows of men sitting in front of rows of blankets and plaster piggy banks. If you look in their direction they will convince you to buy the entire store so you limit your plane of vision to the front of you and left. A woman pushing a grocery cart slowly walks by. She's wearing a cardboard sign around her neck with the word "trash" scrawled on it. You've seen men and women walk around with black trash bags, yelling *basura* (trash) with a question mark next to it, collecting whatever empty bottles, cups, and paper have collected in your car for spare change. But you've never seen someone wear a sign around their neck. It was as if she was labeling herself. You wonder if she's making a statement, letting you know she knows people see her as trash because she collects it. No, she's just tired, sparing herself having to yell "trash" over and over. A man gesticulates in your direction, letting you know he can give you the best deal on some classic ponchos and you realize you've been staring at him mindlessly. You shake your head and look away. Eventually he stops his sales pitch. Out of the corner of your eye you notice that all of the men in front of the shops stare at the drivers intently. Even while they're sitting talking they don't look at one another, but rather look into every driver's eyes. Any inkling of interest and they pounce, extending one arm towards their store, and the other towards you, in a universal "you want this!" sign.

The line hasn't moved. No one around you has. You're certain the CBP officers are changing shift. You watch a kid climb on the shoulders of a slightly older kid and juggle three balls before jumping off and asking the cars for money. They're indigenous, *mixtecos* from the state of Oaxaca. Another group of kids repeat the same trick. You've seen this

dispirited act so many times you wonder if anyone ever gives them money. But people always give children money. If you walked to the Internet cafes/stores inside the curios market you would find all of the kids playing video games and watching Youtube videos. The mestiza store owner would tell you they often spend some or all of their earnings on internet access but get beaten if their mothers ever find out.

No one is moving. It's hot but you don't turn on your AC because you're afraid your car will overheat. You've seen it happen before. All four windows are half down. If you lower them more the exhaust will make you go crazy. You hear metal music to your right, someone yelling something behind you, general chatter. You pick up the book you brought for the occasion and try to read but can't. All of a sudden the second lane to your right starts moving very fast. Cars directly to your right begin cutting into the fast moving lane. Vendors keep their distance.

Drivers here don't slow down for anybody. Some drivers talk about how you have to be careful of the vendors because sometimes they "throw themselves" at your car and get purposefully hurt so they can demand money—an American-ish tactic. But set one foot outside of your car and you'll be acutely aware it's the drivers that pose danger. Vendors have never run anyone over. The stress of being stuck or late puts drivers on edge and they take it out on other people using their cars. You see an opening and instinctively swerve the wheel in that direction, cutting off a now angry guy on his smartphone. The line keeps moving very fast at 10 mph. A new lane must have opened. Everyone is honking at each other, then, cursing. Vendors like to recall the million instances of road rage they've witnessed, drivers getting out of their cars to beat each other up, "Always a good show!" This time things settle down as your lane comes to a full stop and everyone stops trying to

cut everyone off. You look at the clock, 10:30 a.m. One hour and twenty minutes. You're hopeful this new lane is faster.

You spot a vendor running to a shop, holding a baseball cap yelling, "a black one, a black one!" The shopkeeper runs inside the shop to look for a black hat but returns with nothing. A man from a neighboring shop appears with the desired hat. The vendor then runs back to the potential buyer's car. "Everyone here is always in a hurry," a vendor once said. You're not sure if he was referring people at the border or to people in Tijuana more generally. A feeling of uncertainty permeates commercial activity at the border. Too many factors could lead to an interrupted transaction. There is always the possibility that the potential buyer will change their mind, that the line of cars will speed up and get too far, or that another seller will sabotage the exchange. The sale is not a done deal until you have the money in your hand. The time between the request and delivery of an item needs to be reduced at all costs, so, people run.

Around this time of day, in particular on the weekends, an air of excitement circles the Línea. All vendors are out, sporting their goods, chatting with each other, but mostly eagerly approaching drivers and potential buyers. The hope of a day with good sales hangs in the air, you can feel and hear it in the layered clamoring. It's a kind of magic that you've noticed starts dying out by 5 p.m., and is entirely gone at dusk as people stop working, resigned to what little the day has given them, their eyes set on tomorrow.

You notice a man dressed up like Michael Jackson dancing up ahead. There's a small radio next to him blasting "Billie Jean." You're surprised by his good moves: improvised sequences of Jackson-inspired moonwalks and crotch grabs. He's high. And talented. You realize he has the best version of a captive audience, a large group of bored people sitting down with plenty of time. This isn't a traffic light; the border doesn't limit performances to a

minute. And while brevity is your biggest concern, the reality is that you've been sitting in your car for one hour and forty minutes and would appreciate a little entertainment. You give him a few pesos when he comes by to collect money.

Your line isn't moving. You're stuck almost at the end of the *Mercado* where the *Puerta Mexico* bridge used to be. A man is expertly making *churros* to your right. Someone in front of you has their blinker on and is attempting to change lanes. The car right behind them copies them. The lane moves forward as the defectors change lanes and you realize you've been sitting in a *línea falsa*, a fake lane. A new lane didn't open up; the lane was created by the desperate attempt of a few jackasses to advance at the expense of others. Now you're a jackass too. You look at the drivers to your right (you wouldn't dare try to return to the lane you just abandoned) and meekly gesture, asking permission to join their line. The woman next to you doesn't look at you staring straight ahead. The man behind her doesn't look at you either but he shakes his head. You wait for them to pass you. When the line moves again the woman behind them doesn't move and gestures you in. You swerve over and thank her through the rearview mirror.

You suddenly notice there are no ambulatory vendors around anymore, only the carts remain here and there. Where did they go? You spot a group of four well-dressed twenty-something dudes wearing badges and inadvertently coordinated puffy vests. It's *Reglamento*, the civil servants charged with inspecting and verifying people operate with proper permits. Everyone must have run when they saw them. These guys walk around like they own the place.

You're so close to the border now time begins to slow down. You cross the actual border, the geopolitical line drawn with a collection of half-circle speed bumps. CBP officers in full gear walk around with German shepherds, mirrors attached to long sticks, and 12-foot

screwdrivers. Where do you get screwdrivers that size? Are they custom made? Is there one man out there who's only job it is to make and supply giant screwdrivers to Homeland Security? They use all three tools to smell, see, and poke around the idling cars. Sometimes they make 'suspicious' people get out of their cars while they search them before they even reach the booth. Everyone around watches the show; half excited and half afraid they might actually find something, which would mean they would shut down the border.

The officer waves you over and you drive up. You take off your sunglasses and hand her your passport. She looks at you, scans it, then looks at you again. Where are you going? San Diego. Are you bringing anything back? No. She hands you back your passport and looks to the car behind you. You put your glasses back on and move forward, joining a slow moving traffic jam that needs to drive past two huge speed bumps and fifty feet of zig-zagged barricades. Even when you finally reach the other side they still make you work for it. CBP set up this obstacle course many years ago after a car drove past everyone and everything as soon as it reached the booth. They never got away, but still.

It's 11:30 a.m. Two hours and twenty minutes have passed. You're slingshotted into the Californian "freeway", where Interstates 5 and 805 meet. After being surrounded by a sea of idling cars, driving 70mph does feel liberating.

### **Part Two: Analysis**

There are two published texts and an unrecorded song written by *tijuanense* artists about crossing the border.<sup>6</sup> One of the texts is the short story *La fila* ("The Line") from *Instrucciones para cruzar la frontera* (2002) (Instructions to cross the border) by Luis Humberto Crosthwaite, writer, editor, journalist, and author of many fiction books. The song is entitled "La Línea" (2015) by Damian "Fry"—a local singer-song writer who we crossed the border

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<sup>6</sup> Please see Appendix A for a video of Damian Fry performing his song about the border. The second text referenced is by Heriberto Yopez and is discussed in Chapter 7.

with in the first section. These works highlight many of the key issues border crossers raised during interviews, namely, the everyday nature of border crossing, the physicality of the experience and the effect of the weather, length of time spent waiting, and a feeling of desperation that devolves to insanity.

“I’m in line, in line, I’m in line so I can leave this country. It’s something natural, and everyday thing,” begins Crosthwaite (2002/2012, p. 370). The story is a first person account of a man’s experience crossing the border checkpoint by car. The first three paragraphs are spent describing the ordinariness of his actions, his anxiety about the wait time, the types of cars around him and the people sitting inside them, and the weather. “I would like to move forward, but this line of cars is in no hurry. Not even with this heat that squeezes us and forces us to sweat” (Crosthwaite, p. 370). Chunks of hectic descriptions of other drivers’ actions, soundscapes of children crying, loud music, and honking, his reading of neighboring cars’ allegiance and betrayal through their desperate lane changing—are punctuated by the phrase “The line doesn’t move,” evoking the stop and (brief) go of border traffic. It doesn’t take long before the heat and the wait begin to make his descriptions surreal. “I can see how [my hands] melt, their lines vanish, the nails fall off. Then I understand that without lines on my hand I have no destiny, I don’t have life or death, nothing to hold me, just this line, this desire to go to the border, cross, leave this nation, enter another” (p. 372). The line and the action associated with this place—“crossing”—make him lose his mind but are also the only things that remains real and true. The line’s imposition on the body induces a psychological fixation, a neurosis that later devolves into a dissociative state by the time the character arrives to the inspection booth. He loses himself in the eyes of the questioning CBP officer as he recounts a memory or an idealized illusion of home. In the end, the border crosser ‘returns home’ and can’t even remember why he left in the first place.

Damian Fry's song "La Linea" begins with a slow, melodic rhythmic introduction, evoking the feeling of standing and not moving in the pedestrian line. The first verse continues this instrumental introduction and describes looking into a blinding summer sun. The pre-chorus (00:53) punctuates the desire to leave the line but before there's any resolution, the fast paced chorus (00:58) of people running pulls the crosser "by the shirt" back to the line. In the pedestrian line, traffic flow is moderated at a gate located before the customs building. Agents let some people through only after the inside of the building is somewhat empty. So the non-moving line is punctuated by bursts of quick movement when the gate is opened and people actually run to cut to the front of the line, a socially accepted practice. Not long after, we return to the slow-paced waiting in line (1:22), looking at a clock, noticing the slow passing of time, *hasta perder la mente* (until I lose my mind). Here again we find the physical exertion of waiting in the heat leads to feelings of losing touch with reality and *desesperación* (desperation) in the face of not being able to move or arrive at your destination—basically, being stuck. But before there's any more reflection on the matter, we're back to running with the chorus (2:16). The rhythmic changes again reflecting the stop and go of traffic.

These reflections are a testament to the importance of the border crossing experience in the *tijuanaense* imaginary. As I will discuss in the final chapter on performance, these works also underscore how crossing the border demands a particular set of skills and knowledge that is often developed and practiced—performed—throughout the course of a border crosser's lifetime. Crossers learn the conventions and rules that dictate what's allowed and not while crossing the border. At the same time, these unspoken rules are not simply enacted, but rather challenged and practiced daily as people repeat their commute.

In the following section I will elaborate on some of the recurring themes regarding crossing the border, as raised by border crossing informants. In the final section, I will discuss these findings in relation to Lefebvre's theory of rhythmanalysis to analyze the kinds of rhythms and temporalities present in border crossing.

### **Key Themes in Crossing the Border**

**“Most of my life is back ‘n forth”:** *la Línea* as part of the everyday. When asked “Why do you cross the border?” the majority of informants cited work, school, and leisure activities as the main reasons for crossing, and made sure to emphasize they have been doing this “all their life.” “[*Cruzo*] *todos los putos días de mi vida* ([I cross] every fucking day of my life),” Evelyn explained, lingering with every word, evoking the doldrums of this repetitive daily activity, not without emphasizing the anger attached to this mobility. For her, every day is ‘fucked’ because she has to cross. Others were less emphatic in their expression, but shared the sentiment. For everyone, crossing the border is a “frustrating necessity,” yet one that one inevitable gets used to, no matter how “ridiculous” the activity is.

Paco explains, “*Vale verga pero lo hago, es algo que se tiene que hacer, y lo hago. Porque ya estamos impuestos* [It sucks but I do it, it's something that needs to be done and I do it. Because we're already used to it].” Paco's is a tautological reflection: people cross the border because “they're used to it” and get used to it because they cross the border regularly. This repetition is what according to Tito, makes it so “The whole border experience is really easy to get used to [...] You don't have to be doing it for as long *para saber lo que realmente es porque...* [to know what it really is because...],” Luis quickly interjects, “It's a common struggle.” The fact that it is a communal experience, together with the daily repetition of the act is what reinforces the everyday nature of the activity, thus normalizing its difficult qualities.



“It’s weird because I feel like, people get so used to it that it becomes so normal, you don’t really question it, you already know what you’re going to do,” Tito goes on. He describes the experience “as a process” that involves knowing what time you have to arrive in order to not be late to your appointments across the border, and one that involves learning the “kind of shit that goes down.” For Tito, the border crosser quickly learns the routine, a know-how centered on learning the temporality of the border and not being surprised by a myriad of situations and encounters particular to the experience of crossing.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Luis commented about the strange encounters border crossers experience on a daily basis, “*Pero nada [es] fuera de lo normal para nosotros que tenemos años cruzando la pinche frontera.* There’s nothing new for us, [except] that once in a while, *que se cae un pedazo de la Linea y aplasta los carros.*” (But nothing is out of the ordinary for those of us who have been crossing the fucking border for years. There’s nothing new for us, [except] that once in a while, a piece of the *Linea* falls and crushes some cars). He was referring to a moment in 2014 when the new checkpoint structure was still under construction and part of the roof collapsed while the car lanes were in operation. Nobody died. The statement is poignant: the threshold for extraordinary is so high that for something to qualify, it has to measure up to the collapse of the border. There are countless ‘crazy’ stories involving police chases, car crashes, attempted suicides, human ladders to cross over the fence, protests, shoot outs, births...and somehow Luis remembers a piece of the border crumbling as the most compelling. It’s as if the physical structure questioned its own existence in that moment, a crack of doubt making the whole thing fall apart. Not without crushing a few border crossers in the process.



A view of the inspection booths under renovation in 2014...or of the fallen *Linea*?

The shared nature of the “struggle” means that a new border crosser is brought into the fold very fast, becoming part of the group, by the act of crossing the border. Every act of crossing thus becomes a learning moment where one is taught how to behave and what to expect by those around him.

Tito calls on Wesley—who is new to the city and has crossed the border for the least amount of time (five months)—to corroborate that one gets used to crossing the border quickly. Wesley responds with a recent musing:

How weird it is that I’m used to standing for an hour straight. Like, that’s nothing now, for me. Standing in line for an hour would be like ‘oh shit, that was really quick.’ Where if I wasn’t crossing the border every day, standing for an hour would be like ‘what’s taking so long, why the fuck have I been standing for an hour.’

Wesley confirms Tito’s observation, acknowledging he has been conditioned to and gained consciousness of a border time regime that stipulates a one-hour wait is surprisingly fast (and thus good) because he has been crossing the border every day. If he were not a regular crosser, one hour would be a very long time. But we can extend his observation further to highlight how this thought process only makes sense in the context of the border. If Wesley, or anyone, was standing, waiting in line, for one hour the “weird” reaction would still be “that was really quick.” For Wesley, who again, is new to border crossing, what’s “weird” is that this thought process and the feeling itself is now normal. This brief decontextualization of the action reveals a glimpse of its absurd nature. This is part of what Tito was referencing before, how “[crossing] becomes so normal, you don’t really question it.” Yet among this group of border crossers there was a high degree of questioning that was consciously downplayed, ignored, or deflected, as we will see in the following section.

During the conversations a series of terms arose, terms that were developed on the spot, but were very quickly agreed upon and incorporated into the group discussion. These were: 1) “border rage,” a play on ‘road rage,’ which highlights the importance of anger as

part of the border crossing experience, 2) “border buddies,” which refers to the loose acquaintances one develops with strangers from crossing the border at the same time every day, and 3) “border celebrities,” a term generally reserved for the ‘crazy’ people that also cross the border regularly, and that in falling out of line make themselves a presence and spectacle. This quick development of terminology leads me to assume any series of nouns could become borderized with the simple addition of the word ‘border’ before them, e.g. border breakfast, border love, border blues, and so on. What’s important to note here is that given the place the border has in border crossers’ everyday life, the propensity for bordertization is high. Border crossers emphatically remarked on the ways everyday actions, situations, and feelings develop in a very particular way when they take place at the border. Put another way, certain day-to-day actions and situations can only develop in the ways that they do because of the border.

The term “border rage,” for example, appeared in conversation when Evelyn was telling the story of a time she got into a fistfight with a woman during Christmas season.

Evelyn: Shit gets more hostile when you’re walking [across] during Christmas time

[*Everyone agrees emphatically*]

Tito: That’s a whole ‘nother thing. It’s like a whole different world

Evelyn: *Todo mundo quiere comprar regalos de aquel lado* [Everyone wants to buy presents on the other side], cus it’s cheaper, it’s more cost efficient, I get it...but, people are there since three in the morning to go buy fucking stuffed animals at *Kmart*. And it’s like...I’ve been in fights there myself, not starting them, but defending myself, you know?

[...]

This one time there was this one lady, *cuando la salida era por las escaleras, no la nueva* [when the exit was through the stairs, not the new one], she couldn’t handle all the shit she was carrying and I was walking in front of her [...] I offered help and she said, ‘No! I got this’ [...] and she kept hitting my ankles and it felt like it was on purpose and I kept looking back and she said ‘WHAT?’ I’m like, ‘What do you mean, ‘what?’ You’re fucking trampling my ankles.’

And then, eventually some old lady had her cart too and I was helping her and she threw her *maleta* [suitcase] at me and I'm like, 'Ooooo, this bitch.' And I had a bad day at work and I was just ready to fucking throw a punch at someone, so I did.

Right after she threw a punch at me first.

We got down at the fucking stairs; the cops couldn't get us off each other. Until some other lady grabbed her by the hair and that's when she let go, and I'm just like, 'What am I doing?' So I bailed [...]

Luis: It's border rage!

Evelyn: Si, si, it's a thing, it's a thing, it really is

Tito: Stress, fucks you up

Evelyn sets the scene for her instance of "border rage" by describing Christmas season at the border, one that includes absurdly long wait times and thus, higher stress, all to buy "stuffed animals at *Kmart*." As a daily crosser, this spike in traffic is more than an annoyance for Evelyn, as she is forced to reprogram her weekly schedules around often-unpredictable border crossing times as more people go to the U.S. to buy gifts. She is not exaggerating—crossing the border, especially on foot, in December is extraordinarily chaotic. And the days she doesn't cross to go to school, she crosses to go to work as a server at a chain restaurant in the busiest mall in San Diego, right across the border.

According to Evelyn, this fight was prompted by the general stress of the season, a bad day at work and by the fact that her adversary was encumbered by too many gifts. What's notable in this story is that the fighting takes place as she is returning to Mexico, not while she is crossing the border. This is an important detail that evidences another aspect of pedestrian border crossing raised by informants: standing very close to a stranger for hours can be "awkward." And while much violence takes place in the pedestrian line, when movement is limited it usually takes the form of verbal insults. It is not strategic to physically assault someone who you will have to stand next to for hours. As one informant pointed out, "you risk losing your spot."

Comparatively, physical violence associated with “border rage” takes place regularly with vehicle traffic. Intentional and unintentional fender benders associated with cutting in line result in crashed cars, physical altercations, flying coffee mugs, and the like. The relative protection offered by the car, combined with the possible damage to personal property (the car), are key distinguishing factors.



An average day in the “old” pedestrian exit with view of pedestrian line in the middle ground and vehicle lanes in the background.

Photograph by Lourdes Lizardi Lopez

The point that I’m making is that while returning to Mexico, both Evelyn and the woman were walking, or, more precisely, were having a difficult time walking. This was not only because the woman “couldn’t handle all the shit she was carrying” (or, pushing in her cart), but because the passage itself was saturated with others returning home during a rush

hour Christmas season. Movement was constricted further because at that time the Mexican entrance was a narrow set of crooked stairs that left the return commuter in front of the same set chaotic lines they had themselves waited in only a few hours before. Her story conveys a sense of compounded frustration brought about by the border—a border checkpoint regime dictating that people should spend an exorbitant amount of time waiting in line. Evelyn’s (and presumably, her opponent’s) bad day culminated in a fight at the border, because their rage in that moment rose out of a generalized aversion to the place and their inability to do anything against it except maybe throw a punch.

Her self-questioning “What am I doing?” was a reflection on a momentary loss of control in a place predicated on unbounded control. Luis quickly explains this lapse of reason through “border rage,” as though to say, ‘the border brought out this rage in you.’ According to informants, the border has a characteristic type of rage because it can only be provoked by interactions that take place at the border, because only the border itself can incite them. For Tito, the rage is rooted in excessive stress. The border is so stressful it “fucks you up,” making one do unusual things like punch a stranger.

Yet despite all of the stress and anger associated with the border, it remains a crucial part of informants’ everyday. When Tito introduced himself, he described his life in relation to border crossing by saying, “most of my life is back ‘n forth.” The constant movement to and fro is a drab exercise, because going one way inevitably means having to return to the other. It’s as if his life was stuck in that repetitive circular motion, in that place. Cross border mobility is a privilege often described as a burden because it is physically and psychologically exhausting, evoking not only rage, but resignation among border crossers.

**“A monument of oppression”: The oppression and depression of the border.**

Our group conversations involved much yelling and talking over each other, conveying a

sense of excitement. But it was an exasperated kind of excitement. I initially assumed the booze and *norteño* in us was at fault. In Mexico, *norteños* (northerners) are touted as inappropriately loud and rude in their speech. Upon reflection, however, I realized a large part of what was fueling people's noticeably agitated responses was the topic itself; the negative feelings associated with the border were manifesting themselves in a different context because they were being remembered and relived collectively. Everyone was an expert; disagreements over personal border crossing *modus operandi* abounded, so too did recommendations on where to eat the best burritos, as well as inside jokes about celebrity squirrels who had developed a knack for begging returning commuters for food. It was a convivial yet often tense conversation. As if everyone was eager to express their thoughts on this intimate but often unremarked topic until they realized it made them upset. Towards the end of the discussions, informants grew notably tired and withdrawn, at one point remarking, "It feels like we're crossing right now."

When describing their border crossing experiences, what fueled the "depressing" and "existential" aspects of crossing the border had to do with the reasoning that this action was a "necessity" and not entirely a choice, and that the act of crossing itself involved a feeling of "stuckness" as they waited in line. Crossers thus felt doubly "trapped" in their need to cross and by the act of crossing.

The two people that cross by car (who have also lived on both sides of the border) described the experience as choice, though not without acknowledging its challenges, as we will later see. Luis called it a "frustrating necessity," but also noted he is actively choosing to cross. He has lived in San Diego before and has chosen to live in Tijuana, where he grew up, because he enjoys his lifestyle in Mexico more. Luis explains, "*Intercambiamos comodidades, la verdad. Porque es más cómodo pagar 350 dólares por una casa de tres recamaras aquí y tener que durar,*

*ponle, cuatro horas al día en promedio en commute, pero pues en realidad la vida acá es más sabrosa para uno...* (We exchange kinds of comfort, really. Because it's more comfortable to pay 350 dollars for a three bedroom house here and have to wait, say, four hours on average on commuting, but really, life here 'has more flavor' [is more enjoyable]...).” Paco, who grew up on the U.S. side of the border, agrees, saying “*Por más caro que es vivir en Estados Unidos, la armas, como lo están haciendo miles de personas, pero escogemos este estilo de vida* (No matter how expensive the U.S. is, we could make it work like thousand of other people are doing, but we choose this lifestyle).” The implication here is that if one is able to live on the U.S. side of the border, one will still choose to live in Mexico and commute to work in the U.S. because the quality of life is better under this arrangement.<sup>8</sup>

But for others, living in San Diego is not an option because their family lives in Tijuana or they or their family don't have papers to live in the U.S., and because the cost of living in San Diego is prohibitive compared to Tijuana's, even with an American wage. Evelyn explains, “Something my coworkers bring up is, ‘you could spend that extra money and rent in San Diego and make up for all that lost time.’ But it's like, most of us can't afford that shit, so we kinda have to go through this.” All informants work in San Diego. In the context of the border region, if one is able to work in the U.S. (even illegally) they do, no matter where they live. For people like Evelyn, Paco, Luis, and others, employment can be a choice, but not entirely because the Mexican minimum wage is much lower than the American one, even with a relatively lower cost of living in Tijuana. Originally from Compton, California, Evelyn has been living in Tijuana since 2008 after her family moved there when her father was deported after a traffic infraction. At 18, she became her family's main breadwinner, as her parents were self-employed in Tijuana, unable to work in the U.S.

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<sup>8</sup> In recent years, Tijuana has seen a surge in white and Mexican San Diegans relocating to Tijuana due to lower costs of living and the rising value of the dollar vis-à-vis the peso. Beach side neighborhood rents have soared.



For Evelyn, now 24, the border is a “billion dollar industry” because border enforcement cost billions of dollars and is designed to let only a certain amount of migrants into the U.S. for their cheap labor, she explains. “I think about that a lot when I’m standing at the border...‘man, fuck this entire shit...’” Tito chimes in to agree, “the border can get really depressing.” But Evelyn clarifies that for her the border is not only “emotionally stressful and draining,” but “a monument of oppression, that’s what it is,” she articulates, punctuating her declaration by sitting back in her chair. For Evelyn, the border represents an unfair system that squashes and controls brown people’s lives. She sees the checkpoint building itself celebrating this injustice. The border forever transformed her own life when her father was deported and continues to dominate her day-to-day as she waits in line for hours to work and go to school in San Diego.

Feelings of impotence contribute to an understanding of the border as an oppressive place, but oppressive and depressive go hand in hand. I asked informants to elaborate on what was depressing about crossing the border. “For one,” Tito responded, “seeing the unfair treatment of a lot of people [...] You feel oppressed by the authority there because they can do whatever the fuck they want and basically you’re fucked, you can’t do anything [...] It’s a very limiting environment, you can act this way or this way.” At the border checkpoint, feelings of oppression and entrapment are tied to the ever-changing rules imposed on action and physical movement by CBP, as well as the limited rights one has at the hands of CBP—even in the case of U.S. citizens. The crosser is expected to stand patiently in line, follow markers and fences, and not cause a ruckus. If they don’t obey they risk delays, at best, or losing the ability to cross permanently, at worst. These rules of behavior, however, seem arbitrary to border crossers and recourse for wrongdoing at the hands of CBP is limited. Damian explains, “You’re trapped, it’s not like other situations, you

can't just keep walking and not see people's need." Seeing poverty and "people's need" is unavoidable; beggars stand next to you, Africans and Central Americans seeking asylum wait and sit next to you. This aspect is most acutely felt while waiting in the pedestrian line. The limitations imposed on movement by CBP regulations and the high levels of traffic present an oppressive/depressive dynamic, making people feel simultaneously trapped, oppressed, and saddened by the experience of crossing the border.

According to Paco, one way to deal with all of this is to "zone out." "The whole crossing experience, it's not that I'm used to it, or normalize it, I still fucking hate it, but [when] it gets to you, it's fucking depressing, so I try to make the most out of it. 'Fuck it, if I'm going to be here, I'll just zone out' [...] You either manage it, or it depresses you." For Paco and others, it's important to not think too deeply about the experience, especially in the moments when it's easy to think about it, which are often when you're in the middle of crossing. Otherwise, reflecting too deeply on this daily experience can lead to "depression," because even when you get used to it, you "still hate it." "You get existential," Luis explains, "You fucking start wondering, 'what the fuck am I doing with my life?'" To which Evelyn responds in agreement, "Every day."

Crossing is an action where power, the body, and the everyday commute intersect. Many crossers emphasize that the act itself is not extraordinary, but its impact on people's lives is because of the length of time it takes. Waiting in line in this particular space that restricts and confines movement and behavior through its architecture and state rules forces a space-time for reflection (*revolver*). Informants not only spend a large amount of time and energy organizing their lives around border crossing, but because border crossing takes the time that it does, they also spend a lot of time reflecting on the experience as it is taking place.

**Border communities: “border buddies,” cutting, and other disruptions.** The

border and crossing the border was described as a community and communal experience.

Tito explained,

*Automaticamente hay algo de toda la gente ahí, something that bonds them. Todos estan experimentando lo mismo. Nadie quiere estar ahí. Todos probablemente tienen años haciendolo y todos saben como funciona. Y te relacionas rápido con las personas. Por eso pasan más cosas a pie porque estas ahí, literalmente.*

(There’s something that happens automatically with all of the people there, something that bonds them. Everyone is experiencing the same thing. Nobody wants to be there. Everyone has probably been doing this for years and they all know how it works. So you immediately relate to people. That’s why more stuff happens on foot, because you’re right there literally [next to people].)

Tito makes the case border crossers share an automatic bond because they all share in the experience of crossing. The act of crossing in that moment (and likely many times before) unites them. A key component is the communal recognition that “nobody wants to be there.” Nobody wants to be doing what they’re doing, yet they’re still doing it together. This fosters complicity and relatability among border crossers, especially between those who cross on foot.

People described bonding over various forms of spectacle: seeing “crazy people” (many of whom have become “border celebrities”), the public shaming of people who cut in line, and minor rebellions against CBP. The Yelling White Man described at the beginning had been hanging around the border for at least a month screaming elaborate government conspiracies. There’s another anecdote of a euphoric man who kept singing and dancing as he waited in line for four hours. When he entered the Customs building he squatted and defecated in line, much to the chagrin of everyone around him, but without CBP ever noticing because it was a day before Christmas. After he passed the inspection booths while still in the building, he collapsed and had a seizure. One the one hand the group shakes their head, othering the mad because they are falling out of line, often literally. On the other, the

group appreciates the mad because their actions are a spectacle that relieves the boredom of waiting. Most importantly, their disruption of routine is also a disruption to the system that has established that routine in the first place. This is spectacle as disruption.

Another moment of unity described twenty who had cut in line getting escorted to the back of the line, while everyone standing in line from beginning to end clapped and cheered. “This happens one out of five times you cross, but when it happens it’s awesome.” People cut in line often and rarely get penalized so when they do there is a collective sense that justice is finally being served.

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It’s worth noting informants made a distinction between what they called this type of “unsanctioned” cutting and other forms of “sanctioned” cutting. Forms that are acceptable include high school students’ ritual of gathering at the entrance of the main gate until they reach a critical mass before rushing the entrance without having to wait in line. Or when people progress through the gate and run before entering the building, leaving some of the people who used to be standing in front of them behind. If you are willing (and able) to run then your advancement is permitted. Another form of “sanctioned cutting” is allowing a friend, a stranger, or two to cut in front of you. People resort to looking for a friend or a friendly stranger when they are running late so that they may cut in front of them. When I crossed the border with Evelyn a young man waiting before the gate decided to ask us if he could cut. As soon as we passed the gate he took off running. “I always let them cut when they ask,” Evelyn had said. Which leads me to another form of unsanctioned cutting. Like this young man, people often stand around the entrance and simply stand in front of you when you’re not looking. This is what Evelyn is referring to about not asking. When this happens she yells at them (the cutter pretends they can’t hear) and makes sure to stand in

front of them. Not everyone does this however, so this kind of cutting takes place regularly, which is why crossers emphasize the importance of hyper vigilance when crossing. Another form of unsanctioned cutting mentioned was white Americans who don't usually cross walking all the way to the front of the line because they assume there's a different lane for citizens. Usually the guards send them to the back of the line much to the pleasure of the Mexicans standing in line.

Reducing the amount of time waiting in line is so valued that it has become a site for business ventures. The earliest one was the bicycle one. As previously mentioned 2001 (post-9/11) was the advent of six hour-long waits and 2,000 plus pedestrian queues due to increased security control. The rule with bikes back then was they could be used to cut to the front, so someone started renting bicycles for seven dollars. You would walk your bike across and someone on the other side would collect and return it to Mexico. Soon, there were three open-air shops renting mostly children's bicycles to anyone in a rush who could afford the price. Within weeks the number of bicycle walkers soared, and U.S. customs was forced to create a bicycle lane to control the traffic. As the new lane began to slow things down, the rental shops went out of business, and the bicycle lane eventually disappeared. Nowadays if you cross with a bicycle you still have to wait in line. Around the same time another business started with mini buses. There is a special lane reserved for tourism buses located next to the pedestrian lane. These buses unload their riders at the front of the pedestrian line. People charged ten dollars (price hasn't changed much) promising a speedy crossing in the comfort of a seat. But so many buses were involved that the crossing time was rarely faster than waiting on foot, sometimes it was even longer. This service is a gamble then and too expensive for commuters, though it does offer the option of sitting while waiting. Another cutting business practice involves paying someone who manages other

people (usually vagrants-drug addicts) who will stand in line for you. This frees up the paying crosser to move about and do other things while someone else does the labor of crossing.

When near the gate, you switch places.

In the case of cars, cutting is a common practice. Acceptable cutting includes motorcycle drivers who are allowed to cut to the front of the line, drivers who ask to change lanes, and drivers who don't ask to change lanes but swiftly do because the driver they cut in front of was distracted. (As mentioned above, the pedestrian equivalent of this is not an acceptable way to cut). This last form of cutting is acceptable on a spectrum; dependent on how much space the cutting car is able to take in the first movement. It's allowed in so far as the driver that cuts is perceived to be more skilled than the driver they just cut off because they were able to move their car with precision and were more vigilant than the obviously distracted driver. However, the less space taken in that first move, the more chances the car you're cutting will defend their position successfully. This then would enter the "unsanctioned cutting" category, as it becomes more of a skirmish. Other forms of unacceptable cutting include the frequent cutting that takes place when drivers first join the line. As the line extends farther away from the checkpoint area, the crossing lanes sit next to other lanes leading to other parts of the city. Some drivers advance through these more fluid lanes only to cut into the crossing lanes where people have already been waiting for minutes or hours. During times of high traffic, Tijuana police sit at these intersections patrolling traffic in attempts to prevent this behavior and the fighting that often ensues, but this type of cutting still takes place every day.

The hyper vigilance and high stress experienced while crossing the border influences driving and waiting-in-line styles more broadly in Tijuana, a phenomenon I've dubbed *the Linea effect*. A crowd of people waiting in line rushes a single door dissolving the line; a

person cuts right in front of another in the supermarket; a driver changes lanes endlessly to move ahead faster; drivers speed up to not let another driver change lanes in front of them, but swerve past cars backing up in parking lots; when two lanes become one, instead of taking turns, some drivers cut each other off because they unconsciously assume other car is “cutting.” This all might just be about having to stake your ground in a bustling city, or about a generalized aggressive ‘wild wild west’ disposition, or the result of a poor and crumbling infrastructure that can’t contain the city’s growth, or all of these or none of these and something else. But what about the border vendor who walks thirty minutes to a different part of town to stand on a corner in-between two growing car lanes, which form as drivers wait their turn to enter the *via rápida* (the “fast way,” a pseudo-highway)? How does the *Linea* seep through to other parts of life? Individually, each situation is insignificant, but taken as a whole they reveal a collective border unconscious—a “fight or flight” response born of crossing the border, manifesting in other realms of life. A flashback, if you will, because among other things, crossing the border induces a mild and imperceptible trauma that is relived over and over again.

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Returning to the discussion of expressions of collective unity in the face of injustice, a version of the pedestrian clapping takes place with vehicular traffic. When all lanes stop moving all of a sudden and remain this way, drivers will begin to honk, especially if they are close to the inspection booths. Honking usually leads to more honking and is a safe way for drivers to complain at CBP. But it is also simply a way to express frustration and be heard. Honking in unison does not successfully influence CBP to move faster; in fact it probably achieves the opposite. In spite of this knowledge crossers still choose to do it because it provides a disruptive way to vent.

Informants also described joy in the collective throwing of hands in the air in the face of extraordinary wait times. Like a time Evelyn waited for six hours to cross the border. She had arrived at 5 a.m. to get to work at 9 a.m. and wondered if she should get out of line and return home, but didn't. She explained, "I was literally having so much fun at the border because all of my coworkers were looking for people and they found me way at the front. And we had a total morning party going on there." Luis described a similar experience when he also waited to cross the border by car for six hours. He and his friends bought beer and drank, ate, and slept their way across the border. Another time Luis recounts waiting in line for three hours and being fifteen cars away from the booths when CBP closed down the border for thirty minutes. A man evading police in San Diego had driven south to the border, gotten out of his car and ran through a nearby river and sewage system into Tijuana. CBP closed the border. Shots were fired but the man got away. Right next to this were Luis and other crossers. "Everyone was out [of their cars] lounging around, taking photos. The *chismosos* [nosy people] on the fence taking pictures." He met a woman who had just moved to Tijuana from San Diego to be able to afford to pay her student debt, and they talked about crossing the border. On Facebook he posted, "Nothing like lounging around at the border while there is a stand off on the southbound lanes. #falefergalafida [#f\*\*\*mylife]." In this post Luis is complaining about the delay, but also celebrating the absurdity of his experience. There he was, late to work but socializing in what he described as a "bonding experience," while a fugitive was getting shot at nearby. For informants, being able to celebrate and have fun while waiting at (and in spite of) the border is a way of transgressing.

Luis described this bonding as developing "border buddies." "You get to meet people there, in the same fucking situation [...] everyone gets to chit chat for five or ten minutes. You become buddies—border buddies." Border buddies are acquaintances made at



the border, people informants recognized and occasionally talked with, or people standing next to them who wanted to engage in small talk. While some enjoyed this dynamic, others avoided it. Paco: “Me caga hacer amigos en la frontera. [I hate making friends at the border]. I hate border buddies.” The problem was not only their personal issues with small talk, but the elevated potential for awkwardness given the physical proximity required for standing in line. Damian explains, “*Cuando estas en peatonal, todos estan pegaditos*. And you’re the closest you can be *porque si dejas un espacio y te descuidas alguien se puede meter*” (When you’re in the pedestrian line, everyone is very close. And you’re the closest you can be because if you leave any space and you’re not careful, someone can cut in front of you). Being “*pegaditos*” (glued together) means the usual ways of dealing with strangers changes. Avoiding small talk involves preparation, like bringing a book or headphones, for example. Or in the case of conflict, it means engaging in a shouting match full of empty threats (another spectacle). Wesley tells the story of two men cursing at each other for the duration of their crossing. A man cut in line, prompting another man to curse at him, unleashing a back and forth full of “motherfucker” and “just wait ‘till we get outside.” What was peculiar about this verbal brawl is that they were only a few feet away from each other, but they “couldn’t leave the line or they would lose their spot.” So they resorted to verbal insults, or had the audacity to insult because they were protected by their standing in line to cross. The brawl didn’t continue as promised when they “got outside” to the other side.

**Words and feelings associated with the border crossing experience or the place itself.**

- *Miseria* (misery)
- Rage
- *Felicidad* (happiness)

- “*Cura*” (slang meaning something that is interesting and/or amusing)
- Stressful
- Hostile
- Frustrating
- Necessity
- Ridiculous
- Crazy
- Draining
- Depressing
- Repetitive
- Limbo
- Making one lose hope

### ***Línea* Temporalities and Rhythms: A *Rhythmanalysis* of Border Crossing**

In this section, I will discuss Lefebvre’s concept of rhythm and method of rhythmanalysis in relation to the experience of border crossing. I use a rhythmanalytic approach because it provides a way of understanding everyday life and phenomena that encompasses the sociocultural, the political-economic, as well as the poetic. It examines the everyday as it is lived out in particular space-times, and is preoccupied with the relationship between micro and macro phenomena, specifically how natural and social structures affect the individual. This method of analysis is also focused on bodily and sensory experience of time and place. “The theory of rhythms is founded on the experience and knowledge of the body [...]” (Lefebvre, 1992/2004, p. 67). The method arises out of the body, in a sense, understanding the rhythms of the body (heartbeat, breathing, hunger), as part of and

influenced by larger ‘natural’ rhythms (day/night, tides, astronomical cycles), as well as ‘social’ ones (wars, laws, clocks). “Rhythm appears as regulated time, governed by rational laws, but in contact with what is least rational in human being: the lived, the carnal, the body [...] The bundle of natural rhythms wraps itself in the rhythms of social and mental function” (1992/2004, p. 9). Yet Lefebvre notes that while rhythms are “...simultaneously natural **and** rational [they are also] neither one nor the other” (p. 9, emphasis in original). That is to say, their meaning cannot be reduced to either or both of these categories, but are better understood when observed in action—as they are lived, practiced, and described. This kind of analysis is thus linked to the poetic with its emphasis on analysis as creation—analysis as a creative attempt at making manifest the invisible. With its emphasis on the everyday, place (and time!), the corporeal, linking the general to the specific, and the complexities of representation, rhythmanalysis shares many of the concerns and objectives of anthropology and the kind of ethnographic film I set out to do.

There is a kind of analogy between the practices of rhythmanalysis, ethnography, and filmmaking. It has to do with the creative process, which necessitates intimacy and distance simultaneously. Lefebvre explains, “The analysis of rhythms in all their magnitude ‘from particles to galaxies’ has a transdisciplinary character. It gives itself the objective, amongst others, of separating as little as possible the scientific from the poetic” (p. 87). He likens the task of the rhythmanalyst to that of a poet in part due to the creative process involved in the analysis. He goes on, “When rhythms are lived, they cannot be analyzed. [...] In order to analyse a rhythm, one must get outside it. Externality is necessary; and yet in order to grasp a rhythm one must have been grasped by it, have given or abandoned oneself ‘inwardly’ to the time that it rhythmmed. Is it not like this in music and in dance?” (p. 88). It is a matter of immersion, or more simply, just living life, which also means making life. It means oscillating

between getting caught up in the moment and reflecting on the moment. This is said of ethnography, where participant observation is the performance of the same principle. So too what is described to be the condition of the ‘native’ anthropologist—someone who operates simultaneously on the inside and outside of what she is participating in and observing. “In order to *grasp* this fleeting object, which is not exactly an *object*, it is therefore necessary to situate oneself simultaneously inside and outside” (Lefebvre, 1992/2004, p. 27). This is also a common description among ethnographic filmmakers, who describe the act of filming as entrancing (Rouch, 2003), or boundary eroding through its corporeality (MacDougall, 2006), or through its coequality of time and space between the filmmaker and film subjects (Grimshaw and Ravetz, 2009). All three practices require: 1) a recognition of boundaries (self-other, behind-in front of camera, being-making meaning, etc.), 2) a recognition that these boundaries are inherently permeable, and 3) that this permeability is creative in nature. This is creativity not only in the aesthetic sense, as when after engaging in the practice of rhythmanalysis, ethnography, or filmmaking one produces a piece of literature or film. The practice itself is a creative act because of this back and forth between “being and meaning.” This again is *revolver*. Border permeability is generative, and reflecting on this in-betweenness is a creative act.

**So what is a rhythm?** Rhythms sit at the intersection of space, time, and work (in a broad sense). “Everywhere where there is an interaction between place, a time, and an expenditure of energy, there is a rhythm” (Lefebvre, 1992/2004, p. 15). A rhythm involves a specific kind of repetition of a movement. This repetitive movement recurs with recognizable regularity and includes stops and intervals. “Rhythm therefore brings with it a differentiated time, a qualified duration” (p. 78). A rhythm is therefore a distinguishable measure, or a construction of time, that is also measurable. The rhythm of crossing (which is

one of the many rhythms of the *Linea*) can be broadly conceived as one that is generally long in duration, composed of slow punctuated movements with at times sudden bursts of speed, as when a new car lane suddenly opens or pedestrians pass the gate threshold and run.

Referring back to the beginning of this section, Damian's song about the border mimics this rhythm with its melody and repeating chorus.

To explain the relationship between the rhythms and the everyday, Lefebvre (1992/2004) elaborates:

Everyday life is modeled on abstract, quantitative time, the time of watches and clocks [...] This homogenous and desacralized time has emerged victorious since it supplied *the measure of the time of work* [...] it became the time of everydayness, subordinating to the organization of work in space other aspects of the everyday: the hours of sleep and waking, meal-times and the hours of private life [...] However, everyday life remains shot through and traversed by great cosmic and vital rhythms: day and night, the months and the seasons, and still more precisely biological rhythms. In the everyday, this results in the perpetual interaction of these rhythms with repetitive processes linked to homogenous time. (p. 73)

In the context of the everyday then, the human body (with its internal circadian and parasympathetic rhythms [breathing, heartbeat, etc.]) is linked to and intersects the rhythms of nature or the cosmos (day/night, tides, seasons), as well as social rhythms that include political and economic imperatives (the time of clocks, workdays). Biological and natural rhythms are described as cyclical in nature. While the “repetitive processes linked to homogenous time” are described as linear rhythms, associated exclusively to ‘the social.’ More on this point later. All of these rhythms can exist in a kind of symphony, or ‘polyrhythmically,’ though that doesn't mean they coexist harmoniously as disruptions to

rhythms abound, effecting what is referred to as ‘arrhythmia’. In the *Linea*, this combination and intersection of rhythms can be seen with the border commuter: a person waiting in line everyday to cross an international border, sleepy, hungry, needing to urinate (biological rhythms), in the heat or cold of the morning, afternoon or evening in any given month (natural rhythms), on their way to work (social rhythms).

Rhythms are also characterized by their “repetitive and differential” nature; they are “...movements and differences within repetition” (p. 90). Rhythms repeat themselves in time and space and every repetition is different. In fact, it is this repetition that produces these differences. “...rhythm implies a certain memory. While mechanical repetition works by reproducing the instant that precedes it, rhythm preserves both the measure that initiates the process and the re-commencement of this process with modifications, therefore with its multiplicity and plurality” (p. 79). This differentiation distinguishes rhythms as belonging to nature or the human, as opposed to the mechanical. Mechanical repetition does not vary from one instantiation to the next.

As mentioned earlier, rhythms can also be described as either cyclical or linear, existing in dialectical unity. Lefebvre explains “The cyclical is perceived rather favorably: it originates in the cosmos, in the worldly, in nature [...] The linear, though, is depicted only as monotonous, tiring, and even intolerable” (p. 76), because it “...originates from human and social activities, and particularly from the movements [*gestes*] of work” (p. 90). Cyclical rhythms span a specific period or frequency then restart, as is the case with the seasons, lunar cycles, and other rhythms of nature. Linear repetitions are more definite, repeating more or less at regular intervals, moving to and from, as if along a straight line. The linear is routine, reflecting the imposition of social structures, though as with every rhythm, the linear rhythm still varies with every repetition. But linear movements and rhythms are most closely

aligned with the mechanical. “Attaching themselves to the identity of that which returns, the linear and its rhythms have a tendency to oppose that which becomes” (p. 90). The cyclical differs in that “...the return of a cycle has the appearance of an event or an advent. Its beginning, which after all is only a re-commencement, always has the freshness of a discovery and an invention” (p. 73). Despite these different connotations, both linear and cyclical rhythms constantly “...measure themselves against one another; each one makes itself and is made a measuring-measure; everything is cyclical repetition through linear repetitions” (p. 8). The relationship between clocks and days is an example of this interaction; both serve as a measure of and measure the other, but in a different manner.

What are the implications of this distinction? Of the association between the natural and cyclical compared to the social and linear? Maybe it's more difficult to imagine nature or the cosmos as linear, but social processes can be easily imagined as cyclical, as is the case when one looks back in history at social movements or economic shifts. “The social” (that is, the economic, the political, etc.) is also manifest cyclically. The conflict between these two categories presents the opportunity to critique everyday life in the context of modern capitalism. Lefebvre makes the case that the everyday—where everything and everybody is subordinated to time of work—was able to become institutionalized precisely because the sense of new beginning associated with the repetition of cyclical rhythms cuts through the repetitive monotony imposed by linear time. There is a struggle between how we use our time (and space, or spatialized time)—a time that has become simultaneously fragmented and standardized—and the cyclical rhythms of nature and the body.

In the context of *la Línea*, predictably, linear rhythms dominate.<sup>9</sup> Every instance of crossing is a linear repetition of movement, a repetition that is different every time. “It becomes robotic,” Luis said, in response to Paco championing his technique of “zoning out” to avoid getting depressed about crossing the border. For Luis, the robotic is tied to the mechanical aspect of linear rhythms previously described. Crossing is repetitive, monotonous, tedious, hyper focused on time and speed. But Luis’ ‘robotic’ also describes an emotional distance from the act, a ‘zoning out’ that occurs automatically. Damian described CBP agents in the same fashion when we crossed the border on foot: “*No hay humanidad, son robots y nosotros somos ganado* (There’s no humanity, they’re robots and we’re cattle).” Damian’s dystopian view of the border describes the dehumanization of both CBP and crossers—one by becoming a machine, and the other by becoming an animal—as an inevitable consequence of this linear rhythm. This view explains the mistreatment of border crossers at the hands of CBP and acknowledges the officers are doing their also tedious and monotonous job. According to Damian, CBP agents become robots because of their work. The physical (mental, emotional) labor involved in processing thousands of people daily makes it so “They don’t care, they don’t see us as people any more, there’s just too many of us.” For informants, the linear rhythms of the Linea are dehumanizing for everyone because of their mechanical, their “robotic” nature.

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<sup>9</sup> The rhythms of the Mercado and vendors should be the subject of a different text as individual movements and actions reign. Every vendor carries his or her rhythm and can freely change it. Their mobility is not circumscribed in the same way border crossers’ movements are. Vendors respond to the linear rhythms of the border, of border crossers, but are not limited by them. With no fixed work schedules, vendor temporality is open. All day is or can be work but all day is or can too be leisure. This of course presents a different set of challenges. Though Mexico is no stranger to informality, in the current neoliberal context, this flexibility is precisely why this occupation is also one of the most precarious. Yet, I was told over and over, this flexibility (however precarious) remains the most attractive quality of this job. (See Freeman (2007) for a discussion on these “different logics of flexibility”). This occupational desirability makes sense especially when one considers this job also involves being part of a community, being social and surrounded by people, and can sometimes be the only occupation available to some people with disabilities.



Despite this sense of automation inherent to this repetitive action, every experience of border crossing is also described as being different every time.

Luis: It's a routine. You're not going to get up every day in the same fucking mood. [*Evelyn agrees*] You can be happy one time...or I'm pissed off because I slept for only three hours and I have to go to work. It fluctuates like everything in life. It can't be always the same experience.

Paco: I don't think it's ever the same experience. Even though it's always the same every day, it's never the same experience. Everything is so random at the border.

Damian: The border is the same. We all get to play a different part every time.

Luis begins by articulating other everyday circumstances that affect his mood and experience that is the routine of crossing. This changing personal context is what for him determines differentiation in this rhythm. For Paco, it's both "always the same" and "never the same" because the border itself changes. There's too much chance and 'randomness' at the border to ever have the same exact experience. Damian brings it back to the individual saying the border is actually the constant, what changes day to day is the person. The changes don't take place in the emotional landscape Luis described, but rather in how one chooses to present oneself, what 'part' one chooses to 'play' any given day. For informants, the differences come from every direction, making crossing the border a true rhythm—one plagued by monotonous repetition, but shot through with variety. This variety is part of what makes the experience more tolerable.

The border is conceived as having a dominant and oppressive linear rhythm, set by CBP or the US state, that nevertheless varies day-to-day and even from one moment to the next. People arrive and wait in line, each one with their own set of internal rhythms—their particular mood that day, their hunger or thirst, sleepy or fully awake. This individual diversity shapes people's behavior and relationship to one another, modifying the social environment of the border every day. All of these rhythms take place in the context of

shifting cyclical rhythms of day and night, weather fluctuations, and seasonal changes that are tied to a linear calendar—summer, back-to-school, Christmas season, holidays, etc.

According to Lefebvre, rhythms reveal and obscure. They reveal when observed and analyzed, and obscure in their ability to normalize certain social relations and organization. “The same goes for our econo-political society. The visible moving parts hide the machinery” (p15). Studying everyday rhythms offer a way of seeing the inner workings, of making the ‘machinery’ of contemporary capitalism visible. If “[Capitalism] constructs and erects itself on a contempt for life and from this foundation: the body, the time of living” (p. 51), then its presence can be seen and felt at the border. The “dispossession of the body” (p. 75) that takes place when cyclical rhythms and linear rhythms dictated by the state are in conflict, is evident in the experience of crossing. The most extreme expression of which is crossing on foot, where biological rhythms are more severely violated. Thirst, hunger, sleep, are interrupted in the border crosser—even death and birth cycles, as with the handful of women who give birth or people who suffer heart attacks while waiting in the pedestrian line every year.

“You’re going to work before going to work,” Tito said of the experience. Much like current modes of communication and technology (smartphones) further blend the time-space between work and other kinds of time. Crossing is itself work. During our first conversation Evelyn said she had done the math and determined people spend on average twenty years of their life waiting in line (if they cross daily and spend two hours waiting, from age 15 to 65). “Twenty fucking years of your life, standing in a shitty line.” Everyone was silent in disbelief. It sounded like a jail sentence. I asked her why she did the math, she said she was curious and had nothing to do while she waited in line. After doing the math at our second meeting, the group determined five years was the more accurate estimate. But

the point remains, despite its privileged status and the benefits mentioned before, crossing the border is taxing, demoralizing, and understood to be unfair and unremunerated labor.

*La Linea* is a space dominated by consumption—market exchanges, commerce, and physical depletion. Crossers shop and work in San Diego. They also consume the food and goods vendors sell at the border. CBP is charged with facilitating ‘legal’ and profitable traffic of people and goods. As referenced earlier, in an interview for *Urbal* Magazine, Cindy Gomper-Graves, executive director of the South County Economic Development Council, stated, “The land port is the largest and most important part of San Diego’s economy, bar none [...] Speeding up the crossing process would be a boon for the entire region” (Myers, 2013). Figures of the financial impact to San Diego of delays or closures abound, “if the current wait time at the border were to rise by just 15 minutes, according to a study by the San Diego Association of Governments, the additional delay would cost the local economy \$1 billion in productivity and 134,000 jobs” (Myers, 2013). In reference to the new double booth border construction, Gomper-Graves said, “It’s sort of like a Target or Walmart store, where you see the company installing a counter behind an existing counter to expedite service [...] Now that idea is coming to San Ysidro” (Myers, 2013). The simile between a big-box retailer and the checkpoint makes clear the overarching vision of the *Linea* is one of consumption. Competition for more space and less time at the border leads to raised tempers and fighting between crossers. In a place where movement in space and reducing time spent at the border are so valuable, the neoliberal state and other local entrepreneurs even attempt to sell time (the Senti program, architectural design, ‘fast’ buses, someone waiting in line for you, etc.). The act of waiting is commodified. Waiting means the consumption of goods and of the waiting body.

Lefebvre describes, “The rhythm that is proper to capital is the rhythm of producing (everything: things, men, people, etc.) and destroying (through wars, through *progress*, through inventions and brutal interventions, through speculations, etc.)” (p. 55). Crossing the border was already a commodity in its value sense, as it allows Tijuana residents to consume American goods and in larger quantities, raising their social standing. But capitalist time at the border also produces disciplined laborers and makes the act of crossing into a commodity. However, as Gomper-Graves noted, despite this affinity at the time of the Linea is at odds with capitalist time. It is simply too slow and slowness costs money. Instantaneous movement would be preferred. But the time of the state dictates slowness to allow for careful inspection in the name of national security. This is also not the type of slowing down that is in line with a neoliberal self-care regime that exalts slowness in the face of ever growing demands for speediness and increased productivity. This is a slowness that disciplines subjects in the same ways demands for rapidity do, because as we have seen from informants’ responses, this kind of excessive waiting violates the rhythms of the body in their most basic sense. Therefore, when examined through the rhythm of capitalism, the waiting body is not only commodified through its productive capabilities but simultaneously consumed and destroyed.

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Towards the end of our conversation as people shared their last reflections on the border, Wesley said one of his thoughts every morning while crossing was, “how bad do I need this job?” To which Luis responded, “you guys are young!” Luis has two children and doesn’t see his job as an option. There are others in the group who also don’t have the option of not working. After everyone finished laughing, Damian asked Luis half-jokingly, “When did you lose hope?” Everyone laughed again. “I don’t know,” Luis said, “I left it

along the way, it doesn't have a mark..." He paused, then, "*Se me calló en la Línea, lo dejé en la Línea.* [It fell at the border, I left it at the border]. It faded away; I left it at the border. It's waiting for me at the border. I see it every fucking day..." Luis starts by saying he abandoned it at some point but he doesn't know where, until he remembers the border. He reasons waiting at the border is what has eroded his hope as the years have gone by. The Línea is where he abandoned his hope, he says. But it's still there somehow...maybe hope is also stuck waiting. Luis sees it there, but doesn't take it back. The Spanish word for waiting is *esperar*. Not to be confused with *esperanza*—hope—though they often travel together. People wait because they hope something better will come. People wait at the border because getting to the other side means a better life. Waiting is a privilege. Waiting is also an act of hopeful sacrifice. But to wait is to hope only until the tedium of waiting makes hope "fade away," until hope too is left waiting, until waiting is all that is left.

## Chapter 7

Performing: Visuality, Spectacle, Ritual and *la Línea* as Theatre







“Toy An-Horse” (ERRE, 1997) Photos by Marcos Ramirez ERRE

From 1997-1998, this monumental sculpture sat in *la Línea*. Ten meters high, nine meters long, and four meters wide, this two-headed horse towered over the dividing line between Mexico and the U.S. with one head facing north, the other south. Tijuana artist Marcos Ramirez “ERRE” made this piece as part of the renowned (and controversial) bi-national public art festival, InSite\_97, which sought to intervene public space and produce site-based installations and performances.<sup>1</sup> ERRE’s sculpture not only became emblematic of this art festival, but also became a part of Tijuana art lore and “[remains] in collective memory as an instant signifier for U.S.-Mexico relations” (Sheren, 2015, p. 102).

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<sup>1</sup> InSite (1992-2005) was funded by Tijuana’s state-run Cultural Center (CECUT), San Diego’s Museum of Contemporary Art, and the University of California, San Diego. It brought together local and international artists to create border-themed art projects in San Diego and Tijuana. It is said to have “defined [the] mainstream border art production of the early twenty-first century [...] [bringing] art world attention to the U.S.-Mexico border and in doing so, [becoming] synonymous with a specific kind of site-based border art production” (Sheren, 2015, p.100).



The sculpture is made out of pinewood and particleboard—cheap and commonly used construction materials that belie its complexity and commanding size. With its toy-like wheel base and tongue-in-cheek name, the “Toy An-Horse” is a playful allegory of the Greek story. The piece, with its two heads, can be understood as a two-faced “gift,” where each country is giving the other deceptions. On one side, the U.S. has conquered Mexico and is perhaps attempting to continue this domination by gifting the alluring promise of economic ‘progress’ through NAFTA. On the other, Mexico (like the Greeks) pretends to accept defeat by gifting the horse, but in reality is attempting to challenge the dominant white culture of the ‘Empire.’ Except its soldiers are not hidden inside the horse, but are outside it—the everyday people below crossing the border back and forth in plain sight. The body of the horse is a transparent skeleton; nothing is being concealed, nothing will be smuggled. The ‘gift’ exchange then is not actually deceptive, or at least the deception doesn’t lie in secrecy, but rather in plain view. It is true Mexico and the United States are often at odds and share a history full of conflict. But this mutual hostility exists in a context of interdependence and exchange, particularly along the border. The two heads are joined in a single divided body. Its spirit is of bellicose connection. The “Toy An-Horse” brings attention to the complex and problematic relationship between the two countries.

Though playful, the horse, like the border, is not subtle. The sculpture’s size meant visibility on many levels. In practical terms, the huge sculpture dominated the space of the border while it sat there. Its size made it hyper-visible and accessible to all working at or crossing the border. The presence of a piece of art at *la Linea* brought (literal) visibility to the site’s importance, as InSite gained international notoriety. Furthermore, the horse’s imposing public presence was a political performance that attempted to underline other political performances already taking place day to day in the performative space of the border. By

displaying an open and empty body, the horse sculpture highlighted the closed and crowded nature of the border epitomized by the daily movement of border crossers and workers in the site. Thus the piece's striking openness reveals and gives visibility to the *Línea* itself. Here is a place that demands to be seen, that imposes on people's lives, that has become iconic and representative of a city and a way of life and yet remains 'invisible' to local (and foreign) eyes. *Tijuanenses* are so accustomed to *seeing* the border that it simply becomes another landscape, and one that needs to be left behind as quickly as possible at that. But the placement of the sculpture commands us not only to notice or pay attention to the border, but also to "see" the site as a space of and for performance. As a Greek allegory, it evokes the notion of *theatron*, a place where people gathered to *theasthai*—to view, to see, to behold—some kind of play, show, or happening. The "Toy An-Horse" then also points to *la Línea* as a kind of theatre in the broadest sense: a site for seeing; a place of compounded performances where visibility and invisibility play a key role.

In this chapter, I argue that *la Línea* is a theatre—a space contingent on visibility and spectacle—on *seeing* and being seen.<sup>2</sup> As such, performance becomes a key way of *doing* in this site, a way of negotiating where one is located vis-à-vis another.<sup>3</sup> The visibility of the *Línea* is tied to the excess inherent to the notion of border, which is itself tied to the excess associated with Tijuana. At the *Línea*, this excess of repetitive mix-ups creates a performative visibility of layered *revoltura*, new mixtures on top on barely old ones, a succession of different colored discount stickers pasted on top of each other on an item too suspect to buy even on sale. A city borne from catering to outsiders, the question of how one is seen by 'the

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<sup>2</sup> The intention here again is not to glorify the sense of sight, but rather to highlight the importance of the visual at the border. *Seeing* here refers not only to the physical act, but also to the kind of paying attention or intentional looking that leads to understanding discussed in earlier chapters.

<sup>3</sup> My approach to performance does not encompass semiotics, language performativity, or 'speech acts.' These areas would be worth exploring in future research.

Other' has been crucial for Tijuana. This "double consciousness" manifests acutely at the border. The Line then is a theatre in the sense that its emphasis on visual excess makes it a site for spectacle, but also in the sense that the site prompts performances of various kinds. After all, "in performance, context is all" (Taylor, 2006, p. 149). In the theatre space of the Linea, I contend vendors and border crossers self-consciously perform their roles of 'vendor' and 'border crosser', an aspect that becomes amplified and accentuated through the process of filmmaking.<sup>4</sup> This in turn raises the issue of how doing anthropology—in particular, doing anthropology with a camera—is itself a (co) performance (Rouch, 2003; MacDougall, 2006), as the line between performer and audience become blurred through the interdependent action happening before and behind the camera.

The following section will provide an overview of the literature on performance I will be using by providing definitions and placing this chapter in the broader context of the anthropology of performance. The discussion will then be divided into three sections. The first will elaborate on the performative dimensions of the space, i.e., investigate the ways *la Linea* functions as a theatre and spectacle of sorts. Following the work of Debord (1967/2010) and Crary (1999), I will discuss the links between the visual regimes of spectacle, consumerism, and state surveillance. Here I will focus on several general aspects of the visibility of the space citing ethnographic details of what it looks like, how it is seen, the recurrence of visual materials in reference to the space, as well as the site's importance as a place for political protest and artistic intervention. In the second and third sections, I will revisit the two case studies to discuss vendors' self-presentation and border crossers'

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<sup>4</sup> My research doesn't cover this, but I believe this deliberate performance extends to CBP agents as well. See anthropologist Josiah Heyman's 1990s work with INS officials at Ports of Entry in Arizona and California, including San Ysidro.

interactions with CBP officers as everyday performances, drawing on conversations and interviews, as well as select photographs of vendors.

### Literature Review

Diana Taylor (2016) explains the term “performance” in eloquent but simple terms.

Here via Diamond (1996):

Elin Diamond defines performance in the broadest sense: a doing, something done. This *doing/done* lens allows us to understand performance across temporalities—present and past. *Doing* captures the *now* of performance, always and only a living practice in the moment of its activation. In this sense, performance can be understood as *process*—as enactment, exertion, intervention, and expenditure. [...] It is *also* a thing *done*, an *object* or *product* or accomplishment. In this sense, performance might be experienced or evaluated at some different time. (p. 7-9)

This definition bears resemblance to the definition I provided for “border” in its emphasis on action and its articulation as both a product and process.<sup>5</sup> A performance approach to the study of everyday life (at the border) is helpful in its ability to focus on moments of exchange, rather than establishing a dichotomy between the object of study and the observer-researcher. Performance here is thus a practice and way of knowing through *doing with the body* with/for others. Under this framework, walking around selling goods, waiting in line to cross the border, and ethnographic filmmaking can be understood as performances.

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<sup>5</sup> This probably follows a trend in how people conceptualize nowadays (two decades into the twenty-first century), especially with respect to terms that encapsulate interdisciplinary fields of study. The interdisciplinary nature of the fields leads to expansive and yet obsessively precise definitions. Compared to “(Latin) American” studies, “media” studies, “cultural” studies, even “gender” studies, etc., the terms “performance” and “border” refer to fundamental aspects of daily experience that have become increasingly prominent in the past six or seven decades and thus carry a particular allure. They are also both a noun and verb; though as I argue, the verb aspects of “border” (the border as action) have not been as fully explored as they have been with “performance.”

Schechner (2013) makes a crucial distinction between the limits of what a performance “is” and the limitlessness of what can be studied “as” performance:

From the vantage of the kind of performance theory I am propounding, every action is a performance. But from the vantage of cultural practice, some actions will be deemed performances and others not; and this will vary from culture to culture, historical period to historical period. (p. 38)

The bordered actions discussed in this project are not (entirely) discrete events such as plays, ceremonies, rituals, artistic endeavors, political demonstrations, or other kinds of happenings we currently and historically associate with “cultural performances” (Singer, 1972).<sup>6</sup> I cite artistic interventions and protests in this chapter to make the case this border checkpoint functions as a theatre, but walking, waiting, and filmmaking (this last one maybe less so because it is more closely associated with ‘art’) are not performances as described above. Yet I argue they can be understood as such, precisely because of the physical and social context where they take place—because *la Linea* relies on visual excess and spectacle, making it a theatre of sorts.

Korom (2013) discusses three distinct approaches to the study of performance in anthropology (following the work of folklorists Limon & Young [1986]):

The first draws on Marxist notions of praxis, life as situated, ordinary practice [...]; the second emphasizes cultural display or enactment, when a community presents itself publicly in spectacular events such as the many forms of carnivals celebrated publicly throughout the world [...]; while the third focuses on verbal art or oral poetics...” (p. 2)

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<sup>6</sup> Though Singer’s definition of such performances does describe all of these actions: “Each one had a definitely limited time span. Or at least a beginning and an end, an organized program of activity, a set of performers, an audience, and a place and occasion of performance” (1972, p.71).

In this project, performance is understood to sit in-between these threads. Walking, waiting, and filmmaking have previously been examined under the rubric of everyday practice, while walking and waiting can also be understood as spectacular and everyday ritual displays. In the context of anthropology, “performances are aesthetic practices—patterns of behavior, ways of speaking, manners of bodily comportment—whose repetitions situate actors in time and space, structuring individual and group identities” (Kapchan, 1995, p. 479). This definition is helpful because it emphasizes embodiment, repetition, the importance of context (time and space), and the ties between performance and identity/group belonging. But this definition is more focused on performance as “cultural display” and the frame of reference is (expectedly) identity or culture. Indeed, much of the anthropological work on performance has focused on these kinds of ritual, ceremonial, or theatrical events separate from social practices of everyday life (see Korom, 2013; Beeman, 1993). However, it is also true that ‘culture’ has for some time now been understood as ‘made, not given.’ That is, culture is “performed” daily through big and small events, through various practices, and this ongoing performance is what is understood to keep culture going.

Turner (1967, 1969, 1982) and Schechner (1985, 2013) have theorized ritual and theatre and the dramatic qualities of everyday life. In particular, Turner has discussed the ways “social dramas”—such as demonstrations, revolutions, and other forms of collective public action—can be analyzed through ritual processes. On his end, Schechner has explored the space between performative and non-performative realities—the consciousness of the performer and audience, the relationship between the two groups, the performative context and sequence, among others. Following their insights, I will explore the ways everyday practice in the space of the border becomes ritual, theatre, even spectacle.

At this point I want to clarify different aspects of spectacle, theatre, and ritual. The link between spectacle and theatre can be traced to their etymology. The word “spectacle” has Latin roots in the verbs *spectare* and *specere* (to view, to watch, to look at, to see), and the noun *spectaculum* (a public event, a show). “Theatre” is also tied to the visual with the Greek verb *theasthai* (to view, to see, to behold), but the event or show to see is held in a designated place, the *theatron*. The connection between the spectacle of the Roman circus versus the drama of Greek theatre are fitting. This etymological connection highlights the importance of visuality and the act of seeing in both spectacle and theatre. Yet spectacle carries a heavier emphasis on the visual because the visual is linked to grandiosity, awe, and public display. Spectacle then is far-reaching because it is visually striking, it is visually striking in part due to its size, and its large size is intended to reach or impress a large group of people. Spectacles are thus generally understood to be public events (and in this association with the masses tend to be considered lowbrow compared to theatrical performances).

Ritual (from the Latin *ritus*) on the other hand holds religious, ceremonial connotations and emphasizes repetitive action. Following the work of Turner and Schechner, Beeman (1993) distinguishes between ritual and theatre-spectacle in three ways: “...efficacy vs. entertainment in intent, participation vs. observation in the audience’s role, and symbolic representation vs. literal self-representation in the performers’ role...” (p. 379). Under this rubric, rituals serve a purpose beyond entertainment, one that is often tied to forces that are not present (e.g. God, spirits). The role of the audience is also important; whereas theatre and spectacle rely on an audience, rituals do not require one. The theatre-spectacle audience observes and sees (*spectare, theastai*) but does not participate in the performance, whereas when there is a ritual audience they are active participants in the unfolding action. Furthermore, in the case of the theatre-spectacle, the audience is generally

perceived to have chosen to attend the performance, whereas attendance to a ritual may be regarded as mandatory. Finally, theatre and spectacle are more concerned with symbolic versus literal reality compared with ritual because actors' actions are put-on (ritual initiates/performers are understood to simply act). Between theatre and spectacle, performers' scale and scope differs, "In theatre, the performers represent themselves in roles disjunct from their lives outside the performance [...] In spectacle, performers present themselves as representative of a larger group or a larger reality" (p. 379). Of course, all of these distinctions get blurry (and more nuanced) when one considers specifics. Schechner is the first to point out that the difference between what we consider to be ritual vs. theatre is entirely context dependent as there is often no distinction at all. Nevertheless, distinguishing between these three related aspects of performance is important before discussing the ways these categories overlap in the context of *la Linea*.

In the case of the border, ritual, spectacle, and theatre manifest simultaneously and get mixed up. Walking and waiting—that is, working at and crossing the border are ritualistic in their necessity, in the fact they are work. But there is also an aspect of mutual entertainment (theatre-spectacle) involved as vendors look to crossers and vice versa to provide excitement and disruptions to the monotonous aspects of their respective repetitive work rituals. They are each other's theatrical act or spectacle; they are each other's audience and performers. Vendors and crossers are thus simultaneously active participants and passive observers of and in their respective performances. The site itself is a theatre because it hosts and prompts these performances, but it is also a spectacle—a thing to be seen. The visual excess, grandiosity, and theatrical aspects of *la Linea* exaggerates the everyday performances of vendors and crossers because their actions are in hyper focus both within and outside of the space. Vendors' and crossers' actions are more often than not put-on. As I have already



argued, the distinction between “symbolic” and “literal” realities at the border is already confused (which in part generates these performance problems, but also results from them). Filmmaking is simultaneously a way of looking or spectating, a visual performance (and performance of the visual), and results in a visual product. Adding a camera here then adds another layer of mix-ups between “literal” and “symbolic” realities. Focusing on performance—the doing, the process—presents a way of investigating all of these issues.

A performance analysis recognizes human behavior as inherently bordered.<sup>7</sup>

Performance is itself an in-between state, a liminal condition. “Performance moves between the *as if* and the *is*, between pretend and new constructions of the ‘real’” (Taylor, 2016, p. 6). The distinction between ‘literal’ and ‘symbolic’ realities has maybe fallen out of fashion as the notion of reality has become increasingly problematic, or as ‘reality’ is understood to simultaneously hold both literal and symbolic meanings. Even when put-on, pretend, or staged, performances then are no less real or true than non-performance reality (sometimes they are even considered to be more real or true). That is, that which is socially constructed remains “coparticipant of the ‘real’” (Taylor, 2016, p.40). Schechner explains a performer is similarly “not himself” but also “not not himself” (1985, p. 4). A performance “[permits] the performer to act in between identities; in this sense performing is a paradigm of liminality” (1985, p. 123). Performance is a “paradigm of liminality” because it allows people to exist in-between themselves, and to construct and live out multiple realities simultaneously.

Performance as action reflects the ways imitative, repetitive practice is fundamental to human experience. We learn by doing and repeating (reproducing, internalizing) the actions of others. Participation is a social practice, involving the conscious and unconscious

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<sup>7</sup> In many ways, Schechner’s point that everything can be analyzed “as” performance though not everything “is” applies to the border as well. Not everything “is” a border, but almost everything can be analyzed “as” bordered.

learning, sharing, and repetition of codes, conventions, norms, rules, behaviors, etc. (Taylor, 2016, p.19). “*Doing* becomes a form of *belonging* in a very specific way” (Taylor, 2016, p.19). A performance thus implies a set of conventions as well as an audience or participants—whether they are actors, initiates, or spectators (Taylor, 2016, p. 17). “Performances operate as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated actions” (Taylor, 2016, p. 25). In other words, “Performance means: never for the first time. It means: for the second to the *n*th time. Performance is ‘twice-behaved behavior’” (Schechner, 1985, p. 36). In other words, “Performance—as reiterated corporeal behaviors—functions within a system of codes and conventions in which behaviors are reiterated, re-acted, reinvented, or relived. Performance is a constant state of again-ness” (Taylor, 2016, p.26). “In its character of corporeal practice and in relation to other cultural practices and discourses, *performance offers a way to transmit knowledge by means of the body*” (Taylor, 2016, p.36). It should be noted that performance’s framework of repetition and reproduction is more than imitative, it is reflexive; mimetic repetition is precisely what allows “the possibility of change, critique, and creativity” (Taylor, 2016, p. 15). This “emergent quality,” or “the dynamic quality of performance that allows each expressive event to be shaped by the interactions between performers and audience” makes variation in performance inevitable (Korom, 2013, p. 2). Performance repetition simultaneously hides conventions by normalizing them and makes them visible through difference. This quality resembles phenomenological and border aspects mentioned earlier. Like a border phenomenology, “performance is a practice and an epistemology, a creative doing, a methodological lens, a way of transmitting memory and identity, and a way of understanding the world” (Taylor, 2016, p. 39).

Taylor again puts it simply,

Performance [...] means and does many—at times paradoxical—things. It’s a doing, a done, and a redoing. It makes visible, and invisible; it clarifies and obscures; it’s ephemeral and lasting; put-on, yet truer than life itself. Performances can normalize behaviors, or shock and challenge the role of the spectator very frontally and directly. Neither true nor false, neither good nor bad, liberating or repressive, performance is radically unstable, dependent totally on its framing, on the *by whom* and *for whom*, on the why where when it comes into being. (2016, p. 41)

### La Línea as Theatre and Spectacle

How do you convey the “excess” of the border? How is this excess wrapped up in the theatre and spectacle that is the border?

Representations of *la Línea*—as representative of Tijuana, the border, even Mexico—abound in popular media. Copies of copies of what has already been copied, of what was maybe always a copy to begin with. Has Tijuana always been a copy? An imaginary city? A funhouse mirror? A reflective platter offering up too much, too many?

Visual noise abounds at the border.

*La Línea* is covered in billboards advertising plastic surgery, brand name perfume, binational cell phone contracts—there’s even a large LED screen that plays commercials ad nauseam. One of the ads on the screen is for the screen itself. It’s conspiratorially self-referential—*thousands of people will have to see [your ad] again and again and again*...praising its locational virtue by unintentionally pinpointing its flaw: repetition. Repetition is annoying, tiresome, easily ignored, but in media form it prompts subliminal reception. The border is a place of and for consumption. Consumerism and materialism appeal to a border crossing ‘middle class’ again and again and again.

Consumer commuters. Commuters consumed by the border. The border devours and destroys the waiting body.

Border crossers share endless visual information of the border as they report the daily traffic on Facebook. *The line is up to the fruteria; the stop sign; the bridge; the beginning of the curios; the car dealership*...Or sometimes simply a photograph—a windshield framing the view of the cars in front of them. At first glance, these images appear decontextualized and hard to read. *Which bridge? There’s at least five*. But only to the uninitiated. The old traffic reports cite numbers—there are 500 people, there are 300 cars. There’s no texture or detail in these figures. Visual markers win out because they reflect the view from below, the experience of waiting in line.

Another view of the border: short circuit cameras show live footage of border traffic to be seen on the Internet or through cable TV. Border crossers rarely use these images, preferring

first hand accounts of other crossers. CBP has an inestimable number of cameras that survey incoming traffic. Like the cameras, agents' job is to remain vigilant in order to see what may be hidden. Visuality is about exposure and truth—finding what is being smuggled, figuring out who is lying. The border is the edge of what and who can be known or trusted. The frontier is perceived to be full of danger because it is unknown. Security! Visuality is then not only about what is visible, what a camera can expose, but about the limits of what can be seen, the invisible. For CBP this cyclical negation results in paranoid desires to uncover and detect—even when there's nothing to see.

Permanently surveilled, crossers are also always 'watching the line;' virtually when they're not there and physically when they are. Always looking for the piece of information that will help them get across quickly. Always asking, '*Como está la Línea?*' For them too there is a compulsive tendency to know, to see—because you can't really know. You can't really ever know 'how it is.' Guessing the answer makes for a daily game. The heart always races when you see there's no line. *Gracias a Dios*. Thank you God for giving us no line today, people say.

Vendors too watch the line. They predict (without really knowing) the day's sales based on these lineal movements. Vendors' eyes are permanently looking to spot potential buyers. A driver moving her head, another shifting his eyes is enough to solicit an inquisitive wave or a sales pitch. Stalls are covered with different sized and shaped objects, saturated in bright color to attract unsuspecting eyes.

Their bodies are just as extravagantly adorned. Weighed down by their choice of hat, sweater, vase, frame. It hurts the arms, the neck and shoulders over time, and this costume is way too hot in the summer, but you can't buy it if you can't see it.

The objects they carry are themselves copies of copies. Knock off clothing. Pre-casted sculptures. Mass but locally produced plaster figurines immortalizing Disney characters too soon forgotten. San Marcos-style made in China blankets bought from so-called Arab shops on 'the other side.'<sup>8</sup> When they walk between cars, vendors are on. On display. To be seen, gawked at, chatted with, ignored by crossers.

A shouting match, a fender bender, a smuggler getting caught. Any extra-ordinary activity is a welcomed spectacle. Just as crossers look to vendors for entertainment, vendors look to crossers for a show.

*La Línea* is a space contingent on visibility. Everyone is looking at everyone. Everyone is on display. Its visual excess is a manifestation of this principle. Here, these different kinds of seeing dictate and shape different kinds of performances.

Performance at the border is a visual practice.

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<sup>8</sup> San Marcos brand blankets are thick polyester/acrylic blankets featuring a large center image usually of Mexican iconography, animals, or wildlife. They were produced in Mexico from 1976 to 2004. They are heavier than they are warm, can be described as tacky, but remain a Mexican household staple.

The knockoff blankets are purchased across the border in San Ysidro, smuggled into Mexico, and then sold at the Linea.

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## Spectacle

Guy Debord (1967/2010) opens his treatise on spectacle declaring, “In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation” (I). By spectacle he means “not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images” (IV). This is a world dominated by the commodity, where the ideology of capitalism materializes as spectacle—a collective consciousness controlled by the market. Mass consumerism and advertisement reproduce and manifest this spectacle that despite its superficial meaning has come to dominate social life. “The spectacle is the moment when the commodity has attained the *total occupation* of social life. Not only is the relation to the commodity visible but it is all one sees: the world one sees is its world” (XLII). This commodity world is a spectacle because it is plastic, a copy, a simulation in Baudrillard’s terms. It reflects a commodified version of life back at us—one that is by nature more palatable, attractive, and vibrant—but also one that is devoid of life.

Considered in its own terms, the spectacle is *affirmation* of appearance and affirmation of all human life, namely social life, as mere appearance. But the critique which reaches the truth of the spectacle exposes it as the visible *negation* of life, as a negation of life which *has become visible*. (Debord, 1967/2010, X)

The issue of visibility returns here. For Debord the spectacle is an “affirmation of appearance,” an exaltation of visibility. But as de Certeau and Lefebvre argued (following Marx), this excessive visibility is a kind of ruse (an imitation, a distraction, a spectacle) because rather than reveal it denotes the pervasiveness and thus invisibility of a system designed to oppress us. The spectacle hides the machinations of capitalism. Through its imitation of life, spectacle becomes the hyper visible manifestation of capitalistic death.

This totalizing perspective may be limited, but *la Linea* can be understood as a supreme example of this notion of spectacle. It is a culmination of mass (and over) consumption, commodification, and alienation. The site is a market for mass produced goods where potential customers consume their bodies to cross a militarized, carceral international border in order to sell their labor to make enough money to purchase mass produced goods in another country to secure their socioeconomic status. “The [border checkpoint] spectacle is *capital* to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image” (Debord, 1967/2010, XXXIV). In the context of flexible accumulation, the spectacle image reproduces more images. The bodies of border crossers and vendors become commodities. The commuter consumer is disposable. Vendors transformed into image-objects, walking advertisements, weighing themselves down with more and more goods as the years pass. Image-selves compete for each other’s attention. Yet something more remains. With vendors, the creative force is more obvious. The creativity involved in self-presentation and adornment doesn’t allow the “negation of life” inherent to capitalism to take hold completely.

In his study of how subjectivity has been shaped since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century by the capacity to ‘pay attention,’ Jonathan Crary (1999) addresses this tension within spectacle. Social life has increasingly been described as fragmented and scattered, but Crary argues “...modern distraction can only be understood through its reciprocal relation to the rise of attentive norms and practices” (1999, p. 1). In particular, he explains, there is a “paradoxical intersection [...] between an imperative of a concentrated attentiveness within the disciplinary organization of labor, education, and mass consumption and an ideal of sustained attentiveness as a constitutive element of a creative and free subjectivity” (1999, pp. 1-2). The power of institutions of labor and education, mediated by the market and the

state, hinges on the capacity to control subjects' attention and in doing so direct their action. Crary (1999) elaborates, "what is important to institutional power, since the late nineteenth century, is simply that perception function in a way that insures a subject is productive, manageable, and predictable, and is able to be socially integrated and adaptive" (p. 4). Yet it is also through the ways we pay attention that we can harness creative and generative energy, the kind that can expand institutionalized boundaries of perception.

Attention [...] was an inevitable ingredient of a subjective conception of vision: attention is the means by which an individual observer can transcend those subjective limitations and make perception *its own*, and attention is at the same time a means by which a perceiver becomes open to control and annexation by external agencies. (Crary, 1999, pp. 4-5)

Thus how we look at the spectacle determines how much we buy into it or grow past it. Border vendors are simultaneously limited by and creatively a part of the spectacle. As competition with billboards, moving screens, smartphones, stressful border crossing practices and other sellers has increased vendors have also increasingly adorned themselves. This can create discomfort and health problems. Their excess adornment also speaks to the worrisome collusion between self-image-commodity. But as I will later explain, their self-presentation and decoration is also a source of imagination and inventiveness, if not pride.

Crary also notes paying attention is not only about the eye—humans pay attention or look at with all of their senses, through the entire body. He makes the case:

...spectacular culture is not founded on the necessity of making a subject *see*, but rather on strategies in which individuals are isolated, separated, and *inhabit time* as disempowered. Likewise, counter-forms of attention are neither exclusively nor

essentially visual but rather constituted as other temporalities and cognitive states, such as those in trance or reverie. (1999, p. 3)

If vendors both constitute and fall victim to the spectacle of the border, crossers do the same but in less showy ways. From afar, border crossers are what make the border a spectacle. Think back to the bird's-eye view photos and postcards of the site. Border crossers don't want to stand out, however, as this raises suspicion of CBP, their objective instead is to blend in, to get lost in the massive spectacle. Crossers, specially those who cross by car, "are isolated, separated, and *inhabit time* as disempowered." Vendors spectacularly demand their attention, but this is often a welcomed reprieve from the more invisible and oppressive spectacle that is manifest in their practice of crossing. Border crossers adopt "counter-forms of attention" by looking at and interacting with vendors, daydreaming, and, as one crosser put it, by "zoning out."

### **Theatre**

Schechner argues that theatrical reality is set aside as "nonordinary—for special use only" (1985, p. 117). Theatrical reality at the Line, however, is simultaneously ordinary and nonordinary. Commonplace because vendors and crossers engage in repetitive work, but nonordinary in that it presents a distinctive kind of behavior separate from everyday reality. For vendors this means the space between cars is the stage, the space for performance, whereas the Mercado is a kind of dressing room. On the other hand, the entire Linea is a stage for border crossers, who perform ritualized behavior as they wait in line, culminating in the ultimate performance of the exchange with the CBP agent.

Schechner describes the fundamental quality of performance:

Performance behavior is known and/or practiced behavior—or 'twice-behaved behavior,' 'restored behavior'—either rehearsed, previously known, learned by



osmosis since early childhood, revealed during the performance by masters, guides, gurus, or elders, or generated by rules that govern the outcomes, as in improvisatory theatre or sports. (1985, p. 118)

This “restored behavior” is transitional—that is, liminal—making theatre a liminal performance space. This is because “elements that are ‘not me’ become ‘me’ without losing their ‘not me-ness’” (Schechner, 1985, p. 111), something that happens during rehearsals before the actual performance. And for Schechner, the rehearsal process is ritualistic in nature<sup>9</sup>:

The way in which “me” and “not me,” the performer and the thing to be performed, are transformed into “not me...not not me” is through the workshop-rehearsal/ritual process. This process takes place in a liminal time/space and in the subjunctive mood. The subjunctive character of the liminal time/space is reflected in the negative, antistructural frame around the whole process. (1985, p. 113)

I suggest the distinction between the rehearsal/ritual process and the performance collapse at the border because the quality of revolver negates this double negative Schechner describes. Performance behavior is liminal and also takes place in a liminal stage—the time-space of performance. When the time-space, when this stage is already a liminal space as is the case of the border, a double liminality results. This double liminality means that the “me...not me...not not me” exist simultaneously, with performers experiencing these states all at once and not in linear progression. This is how everyday practice becomes performance, ritual and spectacle at the border.

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<sup>9</sup> A quick repetitive aside: Schechner adapted Turner’s concept of ritual liminality to theatre and explained how both notions of theatre and ritual are part of the same performance mechanism. Distinguishing between ritual and theatre performances is thus determined more by social context than by internal frameworks.

Furthermore, theatrical space is liminal because it hinges on the back-and-forth between the “not real” and “not not real,” allowing for the creation of multiple, open-ended simultaneous realities. Schechner explains,

The [performance] field is precarious because it is subjunctive, liminal, transitional: it rests not on how things are but on how things are not; its existence depends on agreements kept among all participants, including the audience. The field is the embodiment of potential, of the virtual, the imaginative, the fictive, the negative, the not not. (1985, p.113)

For theatre to come into being, all participants must agree that a performance is taking place. When this happens,

A special empathy/sympathy vibrates between performers and spectators. The spectators do not ‘willingly suspend disbelief.’ They believe and disbelieve at the same time. This is theater’s chief delight. The show is real and not real at the same time. [...] Sacred a stage may or may not be, special it always is. (1985, p. 113)

The buy in for all is thus the acceptance of ambiguity and ambivalence; an acceptance of the bordered or liminal nature of performance practice—an acceptance of reality and the self as bordered. There’s no ‘either/or’ to theatre, but rather always an ‘in-between.’

La Linea is not sacred, but it is special. It is a stage for ordinary, extraordinary, and infra-ordinary (Perec, 1975) events. A border is a liminal place that is also always, and forever will be, in-between. It is the site of double liminality where any categorical apposite or paradox becomes simultaneously exalted and confused. It’s a special stage—a theatre. Schechner comments on the absurdity and contradictory nature of human creativity (which is another way of saying human creativity is about openness, about freedom): “...insofar as performance is a main model for human behavior in general, this liminal, processual,

multireal quality reveals both the glory and the abyss of human freedom” (1985, p. 123).

Performance behavior and the border—performance at the border—affirm liminality as the site for both creative and destructive potential.

### **Artistic and Political Interventions (Performances)**

On March 2014, I was invited by the Cognate Collective (a group of artists from the southern California/Mexico border region) to document an art intervention at the border. The Cognate Collective regularly does work at the *Linea*, organizing workshops, exhibitions, and public performances, among others. This time they organized a “mobile conference,” a roundtable retrospective discussion about the evolution of the border over the past twenty years since NAFTA. The dialogue took place inside of a car waiting in line to cross the border and was broadcast live over a pirate radio frequency. Activist Victor Clark Alfaro of the Binational Human Rights Center in Tijuana, Chicana and border film scholar Norma Iglesias-Prieto, and Tijuana poet Omar Pimienta were guest speakers, while a caravan of conference attendees sat in cars behind them and vendors and other border crossers tuned in to 87.9 FM to hear the conversation. After reaching the curio market after two hours of waiting in line, the conference continued with guest speaker Juan Manuel Torres, shop owner and CTM union leader, who discussed the transformations he had experienced over the years at the Mercado. The event ended with a live show by “Sonidero Travesura” (a Tijuana cumbia-synth duo) on the market rooftop and an interview with attendees about how they imagined the border twenty years into the future. This “Dialogue in Transit: Evolution of a Line” would be the first of many live-broadcast conversations while waiting in line organized by Cognate Collective (visit <http://www.dialogintransit.com> for audio and video of the intervention).





Cognate Collective's interventions at the border understand the site as a public performance space by inviting outsiders and people already there to participate in or spectate the performance. The "Dialogue in Transit" in particular understands commuter traffic as a captive audience (much like the video and photo billboards all around), and intervenes to present an alternative performance or spectacle to this same audience. This dialogue focuses on movement, on "transit," in the context of the immobility involved in sitting and waiting in line to cross the border. It draws attention to the temporality and the act of crossing by using the time usually spent waiting to discuss border issues. This intervention reflects on the act of crossing while crossing, exemplifying the cyclical reflection involved in *revolver*. But theirs is a public reflection, as the discussion is transmitted via pirate radio to everyone around. The Dialogue is a performance of crossing the Line that—in making a spectacle of this everyday activity—recreates the act of crossing as an expansive and generative space-time. It draws attention to border crossing as a performance act and opens up the work of crossing to something more than uninspired monotony, inviting us to think about more broadly about Linea temporality. The performance asks: how can what is often thought to be "dead" time become alive? How can we shift focus and 'pay attention' to this time as *generative* rather than *consumptive*?

The border also invites performances in the form of protests. In his 1968 essay on "The Nature of Mass Demonstrations," John Berger discusses the significance of public protest as symbolic performance. The demonstration is a symbolic performance of strength through collective action, he argues, not a petition to the "democratic conscience of the State"—if the State had such conscience there would be no need to demonstrate. Berger describes demonstrations as:

...rehearsals for revolution: not strategic or even tactical ones, but rehearsals of revolutionary awareness. The delay between the rehearsals and the real performance may be very long: their quality—the intensity of rehearsed awareness—may, on different occasions, vary considerably: but any demonstration which lacks this element of rehearsal is better described as an officially encouraged public spectacle. A demonstration, however much spontaneity it may contain, is a created event which arbitrarily separates itself from ordinary life. Its value is the result of its artificiality, for therein lies its prophetic, rehearsing possibilities. (1968, para.10)

The value and potential of the demonstration thus rests on its performance qualities—its creation of a dedicated time-space, its separation from ordinary reality, its emphasis on the symbolic, and its creative-revolutionary potential. To recall, Schechner discusses rehearsals as a liminal ritual process where both the artifice and possibility of performance are born. Performance behavior is practiced or rehearsed behavior. Demonstrations as rehearsals of revolutionary consciousness are therefore also performances in their own right.

The site of a demonstration also carries symbolic significance as it helps shape its meaning by becoming the stage where the performance takes place. Berger again:

Demonstrations are essentially urban in character, and they are usually planned to take place as near as possible to some symbolic centre either civic or national. Their 'targets' are seldom the strategic ones—railway stations, barracks, radio stations, airports. A mass demonstration can be interpreted as the symbolic capturing of a city or capital [...]

The demonstrators interrupt the regular life of the streets they march through or of the open spaces they fill. They cut off these areas, and, not yet having

the power to occupy them permanently, they transform them into a temporary stage on which they dramatise the power they still lack.

The demonstrators' view of the city surrounding their stage also changes. By demonstrating, they manifest a greater freedom and independence – a greater creativity, even although the product is only symbolic – than they can ever achieve individually or collectively when pursuing their regular lives. In their regular pursuits they only modify circumstances; by demonstrating they symbolically oppose their very existence to circumstances. (1968, para. 15-17)

*La Linea* is the preferred site of the largest demonstrations in the city of Tijuana. When people get serious about protesting in Tijuana they don't go to city hall or any other State office, they march to the border. Most major cities in Mexico have *zócalos*, or main plazas, surrounded by governmental buildings that are the main sites for protests. Tijuana has no plazas. Public space is limited. When *tijuanenses* protest (or celebrate) en masse they usually gather in the central island of a traffic circle in one of Tijuana's main avenues. It's an awkward site. You have to cross a wide street full of moving cars to arrive to this roundabout that was never intended to host people. Most of the standing room is slanted as the traffic circle is a large stone monument of Cuauhtémoc—the last Mexica (Aztec) ruler who was tortured and killed by the Spanish and is hailed as a national hero for his bravery even in defeat. The Cuauhtémoc monument is a frequent starting point before marches, but the *zócalo* equivalent in the city is the border. Protesters rally there, make it the final destination of a march, or more daringly, block northbound traffic. *La Linea* therefore functions as both a 'symbolic' and 'strategic' civic center. More than any other site in Tijuana, occupying the border becomes a "symbolic capturing of [the] city."



It is thus significant that mass demonstrations in Tijuana rarely block border traffic. Shutting down the border costs thousands if not millions of dollars to the region's economy, especially to the city of San Diego, and inconveniences thousands of crossers. In her account of a U.S. immigrant rights solidarity protest that temporarily closed off the border on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006, Yeh (2009) argues *la Línea* as the site where public culture is made in Tijuana—specifically two publics: one dominant and documented, the other excluded and undocumented.

The Line emerges not just as the emblem of an entire vision of Tijuana but as the key site where that vision makes itself institutionally real—the version of “the public” able to establish relative dominance over and via this site also orders society far beyond the Line itself. (p. 466)

Shutting down the border in protest is condemned in part because the *tijuanenses* who cross are the image of “the public” and therefore those who dominate public discourse in Tijuana. The relative inconvenience of interrupting commute and mobility through protest is exaggerated (excessive) here compared to other cities precisely because it involves two States and two economies, that is, because it is a border. The narrative justifying not taking conventional protest action is that there's too much at stake. But as Yeh aptly points out, the Line carries a symbolic weight beyond monetary loss and inconvenience—it functions as a metonymic site and as such shapes a problematic classed notion of “public” that results in the widespread condemnation of blocking border traffic because it burdens the dominant group. I believe this vision goes even further—it establishes an essential subject identification with the border, the ‘border-self’. However, it is important to remember that the dominant documented border crossing public is comprised of people from several social class groups. Thus border crossers are privileged in their ability to cross the border legally,

but are often not privileged or a part of dominant groups in several other ways. This issue becomes more complex when one considers the social status transformation that occurs upon crossing from one side to the other. This means that while the vision of the border crossing *tijuanaense* (a relatively small group of people compared to the rest of the city population) dominates the conception of who a *tijuanaense* is, this notion is in itself quite diverse, contradictory, complex, and far-reaching.

In October of the same year as the immigrant's rights protest, another demonstration took place at the border, this time without a blockade. The "Marcha por la paz" (March for Peace) saw five to nine thousand people urging the authorities to act against out of control drug violence. At the time, this protest was the largest in recent history. More recently in 2015, there were several mass demonstrations against the Mexican State's involvement in the kidnapping and disappearance of forty-three students from Iguala, Guerrero the previous year. These demonstrations also did not block vehicles crossing into the U.S. The protester sympathy for the border crosser in these instances can be explained in several ways: 1) some protesters are also border crossers, 2) the particulars of the each demonstration didn't allow for this happen (logistics, number of protesters, police intervention, etc.), 3) these later protests were directed at the Mexican State, not the U.S., and blocking U.S.-bound traffic represents a greater blow to the latter, and/or 4) crossers dominate public discourse to such degree that the border has become ingrained in the definition of the Tijuana subject. Coming back to Berger, demonstrations are performances in so far as they are a behavior, acts of revolutionary awareness that remind or reveal to the protester the creative and visionary potential of collective action. The demonstration represents a momentary shift in perspective, a "view of the city" that is more free and actionable. It is a spectacle against *the* spectacle. By demonstrating, protesters see the city as a

product their own creation, “confirming their potential instead of reducing it.” Following this, I propose protesters do not block border traffic when they see themselves in the border. The Line represents not only their livelihood but their lives. *La Linea es vida*. Tijuana as a border city allows them to make a living and their labor is a large part of what makes the border. The Linea then is a product of their own creation, but also a site that produces them. Berger explains, “In their regular pursuits they only modify circumstances; by demonstrating they symbolically oppose their very existence to circumstances.” Protesters in Tijuana rarely symbolically take over the city by occupying the border because they don’t oppose their circumstances. To do so would represent an affront not only against the State but against their sense of self.

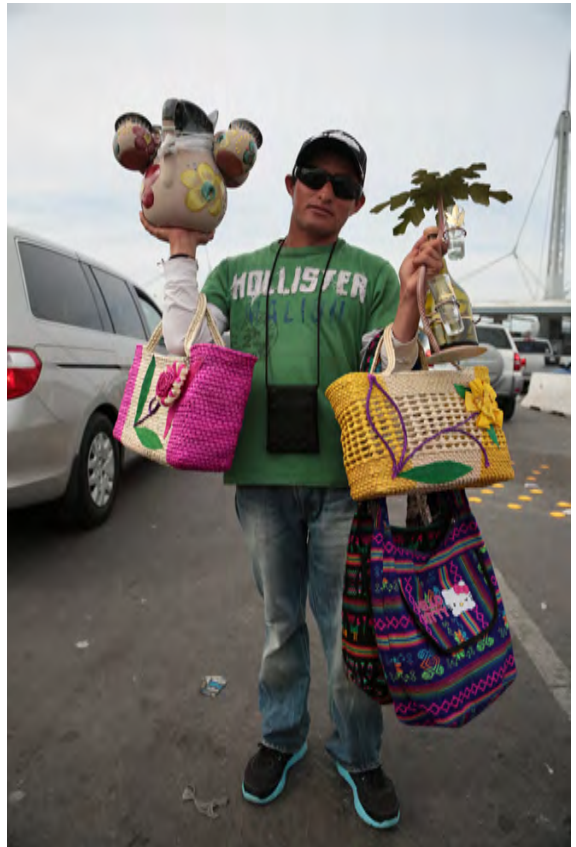
To be sure, an in-depth study of the history of protest and public space in Tijuana would make a more convincing claim. My intention here is only to make the case for the Linea as a site of and for theatre and spectacle by citing specific examples of its importance as a place for protest and artistic interventions (themselves a kind of protest), as well as highlighting its particular quality of visual and sensory excess. *La Linea* is a place that draws attention to itself through its imposing nature—its excess in occupancy and size, visual noise, consumption, meaning. As a theater-spectacle, it inspires, forces, and coerces people to show themselves in it as well. It becomes an open stage for major interventions as well as everyday performance.

### **Vendor Self-Presentation**

With a sea of cars and people surrounding them—on stage, with an audience—vendors are very preoccupied about their appearance. They dress in simple uniforms with the ‘brand’ logo in the case of food, or they cover themselves with their goods, in the case of *artesanias*. Most food businesses have logos consisting of the founder’s name and the food

item they sell like, “Burritos Richard” or “Tortas Johnny.” Food runners and expeditors wear shirts and aprons with the brand and carry signs that display both the brand and the food items. Those who sell *artesanias* wear them on their person; they dress themselves with them. At times the goods seem to be wearing them down because they carry so many (the goods are wearing them?). Each vendor chooses what items to wear or carry, the way in which they do this constitutes their individual dress signature. Both old and new vendors who walk around cars wear the products they sell. A man once earnestly asked everyone around him what color combination of blankets he should pick to wear “*para verme bonito*” (to look pretty). Vendors are thoughtful about their dress and self-presentation—their intention is to be visually attractive and aesthetically pleasing to attract driver eyes. The excessive adornment is designed to win the attentional fight taking place in the border spectacle, but also contributes to it.







This preoccupation with how they are seen also manifests as an anxiety over identity perception. On August 2016, I screened an earlier version of the Chapter 3 film at the border as part of another art intervention organized by the Cognate Collective and a visiting visual artist. When I asked one of the vendors what he thought about the film, he replied “*que bueno que la gente trate bien a los clientes*” (It’s good that people are treating the customers well). He appreciated the film’s positive portrayal of vendors and their jobs; a narrative that runs counter to what I was told was the now commonplace practice of disrespecting customers among newer vendors. In making this observation he reminded me of all of instances the person I was meeting for the first time would make sure to tell me if they had gone to university, how long they or their family had worked there, and a series of other socioeconomic details to ensure I understood him to be a “good” vendor, commentary that often became a tirade against the “bad” vendor.

Vendors are very anxious about how they are “seen.” Specifically, they worry drivers see them as *malandros* (thugs), drug addicts, or *deportados*. Established vendors worry they are seen as new migrants, their *oficio* (trade, profession) no longer deemed respectable by the general public, as it is increasingly pushed out from the city’s new labor order. More concretely, this is experienced through historically low incomes—making a decent living as a border vendor is now harder than ever—and suspicious drivers. This perspective manifests spatially as turf restrictions become more lax the farther away from the checkpoint booths one is. So as drivers first join the Line, they encounter window washers and a more transient population that is usually homeless, and as they near the market they encounter the most run-down section where drug use is most prominent. Vendors with more seniority then tend to place a lot of blame on the newcomers, complaining their unskilled and disrespectful behavior makes drivers assume everyone working at the border is a “bad vendor.”



## “Good” and “Bad” Vendors

I was filming and taking photos around the Línea when I ran into Roberto. I’d met him before and found him to be reticent yet charming with his large moustache and mullet and clever way with words. I asked if I could film him selling the desks he was carrying around and he agreed. After successfully selling one to an equally charismatic driver, the line started to shorten. We stopped walking and Roberto began sharing his thoughts on selling:

*...el comercio es una actuación. El que actúa mejor es el que gana, siempre. [Pausa] Y los trucos...primero que nada tienes que tomarte en serio tu trabajo. No andar ahí molestando a la gente. El que quiere comprar te va a comprar y el que no nomás te pregunta y ya. Y hay vendedores que faltan el respeto cuando no les compran. Yo a mí si me compran gracias y si no me compran también gracias. Atrás de uno que me dice no, viene uno que me dice sí. Hay miles de clientes.*

(...commerce is a performance. Whoever performs the best wins, always. [Pause] As far as tricks...First of all, you need to take your job seriously. It’s not good to go bothering people. Those who want to buy are going to buy, and those who don’t will just ask. And there’s some vendors who are disrespectful when they don’t buy from them. If they buy from me I say thank you and if they don’t buy from me I still say thank you. Behind one that says no is one that says yes. There’s thousands of customers.)

Roberto’s words stuck in my head, “Commerce is a performance. Whoever performs the best wins.” While I filmed him he had been performing for me, for the camera (for a future audience), and for the customer. He performed being a vendor well. Or rather, he was performing being a “good”—he would say “great”—vendor. He smiled, he established rapport with the customer, he appealed to their sympathy by empowering them to help him out, and he knew when to back down. For Roberto, being a skilled merchant meant being a good performer. And those vendors who performed the best always “won,” they won over the customer, they won by selling, meaning they won at making a living. I couldn’t help but think there was much more at play to make a successful sale beyond a good performance. People’s mood, the weather, how long they had been waiting, whether they even wanted to buy something. But Roberto insisted it was simple: people were either going to make a

purchase or not. A good performer would be able to distinguish between the two and put on a show for the right audience.

Many others would agree with Roberto that being a skilled performer (being a good salesman) is essential to the job and that some are better at it than others. Yet the common refrain among the majority of vendors was that ‘hard work’ and not ‘skill’ ensured success. If you weren’t selling anything it was your own fault. “*Aquí sufre el que quiere*,” Manuel said about working at the border. (Here, those that suffer do because they want to). It is a narrative that places all responsibility on the individual and distinguishes between two types of vendors: those who suffer because they’re lazy and those who work hard to not suffer. At different times vendors also discussed the negative effects of shorter lines and long wait times due to CBP mandates, decreased tourism, local city politics, internal strife, among other factors, to explain bad sales.<sup>10</sup> But the “*aquí sufre el que quiere*” narrative always emerged above all other factors to establish the speaker as a hard worker and thus a “good vendor.”

Roberto is quick to make this distinction as well, albeit differently. After talking about the importance of performance, he continues to discuss the “tricks of the trade,” but stops himself before he begins. Again:

As far as tricks...First of all, you need to take your job seriously. It’s not good to go bothering people. Those who want to buy are going to buy, and those who don’t will just ask. And there’s some vendors who are

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<sup>10</sup> Another vendor, Martin, was even-handed in his assessment of poor sales saying, “*No somos buenos comerciantes*” (we are not good salesmen), because we sell things that people don’t want and everyone sells the same things. So I asked, why don’t you sell something different? Because it’s what everyone sells, he replied. We went back and forth with this until he finally said they sell what they sell because there are no *artesanos* in Tijuana like there are in other parts of the country. ‘We don’t have a craft here’. The items sold at the market come from China (blankets and such purchased in San Diego), Tijuana (ceramic piggy banks or figurines), and the state of Jalisco (clay pitchers, shot glasses, mostly kitchen wares and other decorative pieces). The official name of the market is *Mercado de Artesanias* (Artisans Market). Like other markets around Tijuana, it was built with the intention of showcasing craftwork from all over the country. As a city that is home to migrants from every state in Mexico, the market was imagined as a space to offer tourists a comprehensive craft collection. As Martin noted, this is far from being the case now, though some vendors still brand their wares as *artesanias mexicanas*.

disrespectful when they don't buy from them. If they buy from me I say thank you and if they don't buy from me I still say thank you. Behind one that says no is one that says yes. There's thousands of customers.

He emphasizes the need to “take your job seriously,” thereby implying there are vendors who do not. He explains there are some who “bother people” and are “disrespectful” to customers. Roberto explains this behavior as not taking the job seriously, but also as not really understanding how it works. Customers he says, will either make a purchase or not, and “behind one that says no is one that says yes.” With thousands of possible customers there's no reason to get upset and be rude when a sale is not made. While it's true I came across some vendors high on meth unsuccessfully attempting to sell blankets to drivers, Roberto's observation fits the narrative of the “bad vendor,” who more than not being a skilled performer, is someone who is said to not respect the occupation because they're either newcomers and have no attachment to the job or the place, are younger and inexperienced, or suffer from a drug addiction. Vendors could be classified as such if addiction was the only factor taken into account. However, some ambulatory vendors and shopkeepers also suffered from drug addiction or alcoholism but were not as destitute as others because they had friends, family, or employers providing them food and shelter. This social reality, combined with the knowledge that many drivers see anyone outside of a car as poor is part of what made more established and wealthier vendors anxious. “We don't want to be confused with *them*.”

I met Roberto because I was being a *metiche*, a nosy person, walking over to investigate what the commotion at the end of the Mercado was all about. Crowded around a few *Reglamento* officials were twenty or so other men. Everyone was arguing and yelling. As I got closer I became more self-conscious about all of the ways I was an outsider—I hadn't spent a lot of time in this part of the Mercado, there were a lot of angry men around... I too

was acutely aware of how I was seen—a young woman wearing baggy clothes and a backpack, combined with my light skin this more often than not identified me as ‘American’ in vendors’ eyes who received my presence with curious interest or disdain. Once they found out I was Mexican, from Tijuana, and a student at an American university, people either became more suspicious, more open, or more confused, sometimes all of the above. Tijuana, like most big cities, is a tough town. In a site like the Linea, full of people who are always coming and going, trust becomes an even trickier thing. At the end of the day, the only thing you can have trust in in this city is the fact that, more often than not, the person you’re interacting with will either try to screw you now or in the future. Ask any *tijuanense* to tell you a story about a time they were cheated, stolen from, or otherwise scammed and they’ll ask you to be more specific. In a city full of predators, sizing someone up—placing him against a learned and evolving classification system to the measure level of threat—becomes a matter of course.<sup>11</sup> Yet this evolutionary survival mechanism quickly devolves into discriminatory stereotyping and profiling in the contemporary social context. The poor, the dispossessed, racial and ethnic minorities, that is, the least powerful, also become the most threatening in society, precisely because they are marginal, Other. Dangerous are those that fall out of line, outside of the boundaries our minds have drawn up to learn, understand, and survive.

As a woman I was perceived to be less threatening and thus more trustworthy in this masculine market space, but this also meant I was more susceptible to harassment. Needless to say, I kept certain distance from some people and areas, especially when there wasn’t

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<sup>11</sup> My image of ‘predator’ is that of ‘the aggressive meth addict.’ Methamphetamine production and abuse, and all of the problems that come with this, are rampant in Tijuana. This ugly drug is fitting for our twisted times. Perhaps my ‘prey’ perspective here is too cynical or tinged with classism. Human relations in a social landscape always in motion are tricky. But the larger issue here is how drug trafficking—producing meth for American and in recent decades for local users—and this surge in addiction are linked to rising economic inequality, a growing poor migrant population that receives little state assistance and is left to wallow in nothingness, and the entrenched corruption that makes a few rich richer while the rest suffer the continual aftermath of a never-ending drug war that kills many and makes addicts of the rest.

anyone I knew around. So I stood back from this crowd of angry men and instead approached a man who was spectating the disagreement. He seemed amused. It was Roberto. I asked him what was going on. He told me it was a disagreement between *Reglamento* and people who were selling without permits. *Reglamento* was asking them to not run away when they came after them because they could get run over by cars. The men were angry about having no recourse. The officials suggested they organize, elect a representative and advocate in city hall for more permits instead of running away. “But there’s a moratorium on permits for the border so that’s not good advice,” Roberto said.

Roberto arrived to the border when he was fifteen, before the Mercado was even built. He has been working there for thirty years. He is part of the “Triunfo del Pueblo” group, an offshoot of the CROC union. When I asked him how the border had changed he exclaimed dramatically, “*Esto ya no es la Línea, es una asquerosidad.*” (This isn’t the Line anymore, it’s disgustingness). He elaborated saying there was no respect between vendors anymore, “*te roban las compras*” (they steal your sales). “*Antes si alguien trataba a los clientes no se acercaba otra gente, ahora se amontonan y dicen, ‘yo te la vendo mas barata.’*” (Before, if you were dealing with a customer no one would come near, now they pile on and tell the customer, ‘I’ll sell it to you for less’). He also complained there was no control over prices ‘so sometimes customers complain you over charged them because they’ll ask another vendor about the price of an item after you’ve sold it and they’ll be selling it for less.’

This was echoed by another vendor, Chava, who also brought up internal competition and undercutting as a recent problem. “*Los nuevos son muy agresivos y encimosos, no saben como hacerle, aunque a veces nos ganan los clientes si no se tiene cuidado.*” (The newcomers are too aggressive and overbearing, they don’t know how to do it, though sometimes they steal our customers if we’re not careful). Chava’s description depicts the new vendors as unskilled

and disrespectful to both other vendors and the customers. Like Roberto, Chava noted behaviors like leaning on car windows, which is considered disrespectful and invasive, or crowding the customer, everyone talking over each other, “*es malo amontonarse, si hablan todos a la misma vez le calientas la cabeza al cliente*” (it’s bad to pile on, if everyone talks at once you ‘overheat’ the customer’s head). These kinds of behavior overwhelm the potential buyer, making them say ‘no’ to everyone, Chava explained.

Vendors who had worked there the longest (since the 1980s or before) would also often remark on the changes in dress code and the appearance of the market. Before, they would say, workers were expected to wear dress shirts and later a uniform vest with the union logo, and to arrive with *zapatos bien boleados* (well-shined shoes). *Zapatos bien boleados* was the recurring metonym for *buena presentación* (good personal appearance). As a child I too was taught to shine shoes and told that clean shoes were the most important part of an outfit. When my parents were growing up in neighboring Mexicali and San Luis Rio Colorado, most of the town roads were unpaved and dirt floors inside the home were still common. Keeping your shoes clean demonstrated extreme care and discipline, as it often involved wrapping shoes in plastic bags or carrying a second pair to avoid dirt and mud. There’s a lot of dirt in the desert. There’s a lot of dirt in Tijuana even now—it’s everywhere. But being surrounded by dirt means making sure you never have it on you. Based on the number of car washes in the city, it seems that nowadays keeping a clean car is more important than keeping clean shoes. People aren’t standing on street corners looking to get paid to clean windshields and dust cars for nothing. All the same, foot presentation under these circumstances was then also clearly tied to class. Dirty shoes were worse than walking around with bare feet. Naked feet are bound to get dirty, it’s out of your control, but keeping your cheap shoes clean meant you could at least pass as being a little more than dirt poor.

It's all about [*buena*] *presentación*—recognizing how others see you and being concerned with your appearance. *Buena presentación*, I was told, was extremely important at the border. I was told the unions would fine vendors if they arrived with dirty shoes or were otherwise poorly dressed. Vendors also had Mercado maintenance duties, primarily sweeping duties. If you didn't sweep when you were supposed to, you would also get fined. All of the money collected from fines would be used for the end of year party so some said people were mostly okay with the fines. "The market was new and kept clean back then, and vendors were well dressed and courteous."

This was explained to be the result of stronger unions, a time when there was more "control". Now that the unions are increasingly fragmented, have questionable legitimacy, and groups have splintered off, "*hay un descontrol, no hay control*" (it's out of control, there's no control). There's no control over vendor's appearance, over what is being sold and how, or over who is selling it. Before, "*No se podía meter la gente nomás así*" (People couldn't simply 'get in'), meaning becoming a vendor meant you had to have a strong connection to someone already working there, you had to be vouched for and there had to be space for you because permits were more strictly regulated. As hiring practices became more lenient, more vendors without permits circulate with impunity. Upholding stricter rules about permits is an issue that is often raised during union meetings. But operating without permits or with counterfeit permits is a common practice among all. This emphasis on stricter rules had more to do with attempting to place restrictions on the increasing number of vendors who had no kinship ties to permit holders or shop owners and who were also usually prone to drug abuse. These were vendors who did not go to work every day or arrived to work for a few weeks and then disappeared, that is, vendors who fit into the broad "bad vendor" category. The phrase "*hay un descontrol, no hay control*" is significant because it speaks to the other side of having strong

unions—what was described as a domineering leadership. While some attribute the apparent chaos and lack of order to the fragmentation of union power and look nostalgically to the past, others are quick to point out a history of excessive union domination. Some vendors were not happy getting fined for their appearance or for not fulfilling cleaning duties, burdens that seemed to fall predominantly on vendors who didn't own shops or permits. This was one of the factors that led to the formation of *agrupaciones* (smaller union groups), asserting their need to break away from the tyranny of the larger unions.

In her work on the notion of pollution, anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966/2002) makes the case that “dirt is essentially disorder [...] Eliminating it is not a negative movement but a positive effort to organize the environment,” to make places conform to an idea (p. 2). Douglas explains ambiguity often appears as threatening in society, thus determinations about what is pure or polluting becomes a way of establishing or maintaining a symbolic boundary. At the border, the category of “bad vendor” is associated with uncleanliness and pollution in several ways, or, put differently, all notions associated with pollution among vendors are placed into this social category. A “bad vendor” is imagined to be physically dirty—in their outward appearance and dress, but also within, due to their use of illegal drugs, following the Christian notion that upholds the sanctity of the body. The “bad vendor” is also associated with a disregard for tradition and convention—they are “rude,” “disrespectful,” and unskilled at the job (according to Roberto, ‘bad performers’). The “bad vendor” is thus linked to increasing “lack of control” and disorder at the border, which is believed to cause poor sales and financial insecurity.

As larger political economic factors continue to transform the nature of work, people's migratory movements, creating higher socio-economic inequality in Tijuana and explicitly threaten the future of the Mercado, the “bad vendor” as a polluting agent facilitates



the symbolic reordering necessary to create a “unity of experience” in Douglas’ words. Vendor anxiety about the ways their occupation and status is perceived or misread stems from this growing social disordering. The poorer, doubly undocumented, and criminalized new migrants, combined with economic precarity, threaten established vendors’ sense of belonging and identity. Even when poor, even when they can’t cross, older vendors stake a strong claim to the city and job that helped them prosper just years ago. The risk of being misread raises concerns over dress and physical appearance and its relationship to class status. The “bad vendor” formulation provides a way of countering an oppressive economic uncertainty and social class ambiguity.

### **“Security Theatre”: Ritual and Violence**

The U.S.–Mexico border has become theater, and border theater has become social violence. Actual violence has become inseparable from ritual on the border—crossings, invasions, lines of defense, high-tech surveillance, and more. Social scientists often think of public rituals as events that resemble formal rituals separated from daily life in time and space and marked by repeated formal structures. In contrast the violence and high-tech weaponry of border theater is at once symbolic and material. Social analysts need to recognize the centrality of actual violence and the symbolics that shape that violence.

--Renato Rosaldo (1997, p. 33)

Rosaldo argues border theatre has established itself as ritualized violence, a violence that is both symbolic and material. This section explores how this violence manifests at the Linea by examining the notion of “security theatre” put on by CBP and using Victor Turner’s concept of liminality to investigate the ritualized experience of border crossing.

### **“Security Theater” at the Border**

In his “Recommendations for Crossing Successfully into the USA (from the Simplest Way to the Most Complicated),” Tijuana writer and philosopher Heriberto Yopez (2012)

presents a motley list of satirical declarative sentences full of “don’ts.”<sup>12</sup> He shares tips on how to spend the least time crossing or how to pass the time while doing it, as well as running commentary on how class, race, gender, and nationality—that is, personal ‘appearance’—affect the border crossing experience. “Drive a good car that looks classy or that says: I’m middle class [...] If you are dark-skinned, drive a car that corresponds to your status” (p. 68-69). Or, “Don’t look like a Mexican drug dealer. / Don’t look like a drug dealer. / Don’t look Mexican” (p. 69). Yepez’s statements highlight the importance self-presentation and appearance for border crossers, explaining that the car you drive, what you carry, namely, everything that is visible (and what is suspected to be invisible) will be read in a certain way by the CBP officer. For Yepez, crossing is an absurdly cyclical and impossible predicament: on the one hand you’re expected to not diverge from the status quo by fitting into the idea a specific officer will have of you; on the other, there’s no way of knowing what this idea is exactly or how to best perform it. Successful crossing involves performing legality in the hopes of being perceived legal and allowed to cross. This legality is associated with the state surveillance imagination of complete visibility—the more exposed and visible you are, it says, the easier it is to read you, unless you have something to hide, this shouldn’t be an issue.

But legality-visibility-legibility is not a clear-cut thing. Even when “legal,” one’s appearance or attitude can influence one’s ability to cross. Border security and surveillance, after all, is not primarily about complete visibility “but rather a means of dividing, isolating, annexing in order to visualize what is ‘unknown’” (Amoore, 2009, p. 25). This is achieved through “smart border” technologies such as biometric RFID cards that pixelate bodies into

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<sup>12</sup> Yepez is the author of dozens of fiction and non-fiction books about Tijuana, the border, and Mexican and American culture, including the source text for these ‘recommendations’, *Tijuanologias* (2007), where he explains and refutes many of the mythologies associated with Tijuana.

data points that are sorted, categorized, and processed according to “risk” assessments. Biometrics understands the body as a ‘natural’ vehicle that holds identifying data, but there remains an ‘unknowable’ gap between identification and identity, “such that [bodies] have themselves come to perform and represent a border that approves or denies access” (Amoore, 2006, p. 342). Border security and surveillance therefore visualizes the border crosser as a collection of data points the CBP agent then holds up next to the actual body of the crosser in search of ‘irregularities.’ The border is in the body. It is under these conditions that the crosser has to perform ‘legality’ through appearance, speech, facial expressions, gestures, and general bodily comportment.

Yepez’ recommendations eventually move towards the absurd. Before the reader gets the idea that by following his recommendations and ‘doing it right’ she will be allowed into the U.S., the statements become contradictory and nonsensical, revealing the border crosser actually has very little control over being allowed in or not. Performing well might not cut it. The border crosser only has the illusion of control and can “try to guess which agents are racists or which ones are in a bad mood at that moment” (p. 69), but in the end there’s no guarantee to be able to cross and no way to prepare. Unless, of course, “[You are] an American on your way home” (p. 70) —the final and most complicated recommendation—which can be a hard thing to achieve.

By poking fun of all the preparations border crossers put into crossing the border and highlighting how appearance shapes the experience, Yepez’ comments on the capricious nature of CBP procedure and the absurdity of the border crossing experience itself. The absurd is a common theme with border crossers as we saw in a previous chapter. There is an objective (get to the other side) and a reason behind people’s waiting, but as a ritualized repetition in the context of a violent border theatre, waiting to cross the border raises

existential questions as informants noted, much like Samuel Beckett's characters Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*. Crossers begin to question, why are we waiting and what are we waiting for?

This analogy to absurdist theatre extends to CBP infrastructure and *modus operandi*. The remodeled checkpoint, with its metallic structure and 100-foot Tesla coil-like light and surveillance towers, is architecturally imposing. Like Gothic cathedrals meant to inspire awe, faith, and submission through their grandiosity, the border is architecturally built to inspire these emotions but for the U.S. State. It is on this stage that restrictions and limits proliferate in the name of national security. And while the surveillance and tracking of people is indeed sophisticated and painfully real, daily border crossers experience it as an act, as a kind of “security theatre.” Schneier’s (2003) term references TSA practices in U.S. airports that provide only a ‘feeling’ of security, but can be applied to the case of CBP and the border. The purpose of a visibly imposing militarized border infrastructure and processing measures, we are told, is to defend against foreign terrorism, “illegal” migration, and south of the border drug violence—to keep American citizens ‘safe’ from an amorphous, uncertain, but wide-ranging imminent threat. Indeed, much of the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign followed in the tradition of eroding a sense of security and mobilizing fear and anger to justify even more restrictions and further spending on border militarization. This “theatre of operations”—the manipulation of these (in) security affects into an imaginary of national vulnerability and violence—has created a new reality of “permanent militarization through an ever-expanding universe of threat identification and response” (Masco, 2014, p. 37), at the same time that *actual* sources of violence (such as poverty or climate change) are ignored because they are not believed to pose a real, or imminent, threat. The “border spectacle” of border enforcement then relies on the interlacing and reproduction of particular discourses

and images (De Genova, 2012). Put another way, the border spectacle of security theatre can be understood as such because the deployment of surveillance technologies are optic “security simulations” aimed at harnessing of the uncertainty, indeterminacy, and unknown associated with this imagination of threat (de Lint, 2008, p. 177).

While drugs and people (without papers or with arrest warrants) are seized every year, no person suspected of terrorist activity has been apprehended at this border checkpoint to this day. Borders crossers sense the discord between the spectacle and the reality of U.S. security tactics and also explain it as theatre. In Tito and Damian’s border crossing account, they explicitly understood the new inspection booths as being “just for show.” In their view, this recurring excess in policing technologies and strategies exemplifies the collusion of three aspects of American culture: consumerism, a general obsession with technological gadgets, and love for the military (this last point is especially relevant in the context of San Diego, a military city. Many CBP agents are young ex-Navy, Marines, etc.). Security technology may be “just for show” but as Damian sardonically concluded, “the show must go on.” For U.S. citizens and visa holders who cross the border daily it is easy to see that a new kiosk, document, booth, protocol, said to increase security (or as is said locally by CBP, to reduce wait times) is experienced as a frustrating and unnecessary roadblock.

In late 2015, during the infamous Christmas season, a member of the Facebook group “*Como esta la Linea*” posted this image depicting a “Message from ISIS”:



*We will infiltrate the USA at all borders  
 Except through Tijuana because the line is too fucking long  
 [there's a shitload of line]*

ISIS is depicted as sending another publicized Internet threat to the U.S., this time with a caveat—they won't try to enter the country through Tijuana because of the long lines. The image satirizes contrasting narratives about the border. On one side, Washington emphasizes the ongoing need for heightened border security to protect against terror 'threats'. On the other, local commuters ridicule this fear, pointing out the only thing anyone—including ISIS—should be afraid of are the long lines and wait times. ISIS' claim of infiltration is not countered; the border is understood to be penetrable despite all efforts to regulate entry. The issue of entry to the U.S. here comes second to the oppressive nature of waiting to enter. Moreover, this coerced waiting is understood as absurd, justified and perpetrated only by the theater of security put on by the U.S. state.

The point here isn't to make light of CBP security practices by calling them theatre or saying they are put on. On the contrary, by identifying some of the ways security is performed I attempt to expand our understanding how violence and power manifest at the

border. Studies of border surveillance and security have articulated how these state programs aim to categorize subjects and create differentiated mobilities within and across border checkpoints (Donnan & Wilson, 2010; Heyman, 2004; Lugo, 2000; Pallitro & Heyman, 2008). But these accounts (even when anthropological) don't fully consider experiential and sensory engagements with the border, which when taken into account present a more complex picture of how strategies of power and counter-power operate.

### **The Interrogation & Ritual Performance**

Roberto's remark, "Commerce is a performance. Whoever performs the best wins" can be applied to border crossers as well, "*Crossing* is a performance. Whoever performs the best wins." Informants discussed how crossing the border becomes second nature by repeating the experience daily surrounded by other people doing the same. By repeating this communal act, the border crosser quickly learns (is taught) what to do and what not to do. The tired body becomes *acostumbrado* (accustomed to) to being tired, to waiting in line, to performing in a particular way. Performing well means winning, or being able to cross.<sup>13</sup>

Those who grew up crossing the border learn at an early age that the exchange with the CBP officer is explicitly a performance. Radio volumes are lowered or turned off, parents tell their children to sit still and be quiet, bodies become rigid, alert, expectant, and increasingly fearful. Children and newcomers are coached on how to respond to an officer. I remember learning how to say "American citizen" years before I learned how to speak English. I was also taught to never offer any information unless asked and to only respond briefly and precisely to the question at hand. Maybe this was because at the time I was also being coached to memorize where I lived and other information that wasn't exactly true.

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<sup>13</sup> See Chavez (2016), "Strategies for Crossing the Border through (Non)inspection" for more accounts of border crosser performances, specifically those of Tijuana resident visa holders who are unauthorized to work in the U.S. but still do, and who develop elaborate performances—stories, mannerisms, costumes, and other tactics—to go undetected.

Either way, all border crossers are taught and continually practice the terms of engagement. Increasingly, officers take their gatekeeping role very seriously. The crosser is made to feel guilty and made to prove they are innocent of any wrongdoing and worthy of entry. The performance is then one between an accused and an accuser that has the upper hand. This carceral atmosphere of guilt is a tactic aimed at detecting potentially guilty parties, to make anyone who is lying nervous enough to make their nervousness detectable. In an environment where the field of threat is unknowable, where everyone and everything has the potential to be dangerous, not falling ‘out of line,’ or “acting normal” and “keeping your cool” as informants said, is essential. The performance has as much to do with *what* you say, as with *how* you say it—with your whole being.

When I asked informants what crossed their minds right before interacting with the officer there were several responses:

Evelyn: I hope I don’t have any drugs on me

Tito: I’m preparing how to keep my cool *y que no me estrese tanto ese wey* (and how to keep that dude from stressing me out)

Damian: I forget about everything and I think that I’m about to be standing in front of a federal officer [...] I want him to know that I’m just somebody that wants to go home.

Luis: I feel secure because I’m a U.S. citizen. They ask me an average of no more than five questions, usually just ‘Are you bringing anything?’

The responses vary by immigration status, personality, and history to the space. Tito is a U.S. citizen but he still gets anxious anytime he interacts with officers. He has lived all of his life in Tijuana and most of his memories of crossing take place after 9/11, his vision of the U.S. is therefore one of a powerful and dominant institution that can act with impunity. Luis and Evelyn are also U.S. citizens, but tend to take the exchange more lightly. Luis grew up crossing the border before 9/11 and its carceral feel, and has also lived in the U.S., while



Evelyn only ‘learned’ about the border and its ways when she moved to Tijuana, she didn’t grow up with it. Unlike the others, then, the Linea for Evelyn is not a normal, everyday thing. With this distance she regularly challenges agents’ authority by ‘talking back.’ Damian is a permanent resident and runs the risk of status revocation so he is more careful in his responses. Part of his performance strategy is clearing his mind in preparation and reminding himself to be serious. It also involves adopting a generic mode or attitude by presenting himself as “just another person.” Damian adopts the frame of mind that his documents require—as a “permanent resident” he performs “I’m just somebody that wants to go home.” His performance is a self-conscious attempt to link his body to his documents. A winning performance is one that unifies the two, presents no gaps or aberrations and therefore raises no suspicion. What’s peculiar is that Damian *is* on his way home when he crosses the border, but is nevertheless compelled to perform going home, to perform himself.

The difference in the way CBP officers interact with Evelyn and everyone else in the group became apparent when she gave more details about her exchanges:

Evelyn: *Yo tengo la suerte de que los migra siempre me dicen pendejada y media [...] Me entretienen mucho tiempo preguntado que estudias? Why don’t you have a ring on your finger?... (I’m fated to always get officers that say dumb shit and a half to me [...]) They always hold me up asking questions, what do you study?...*

Mael: So they’re flirting with you?

Evelyn: I don’t know if its because I’m a woman...

Tito: They probably are. They do all the time.

Wesley: The other day I saw these two cute girls, maybe 19 years old, and the officer probably in his mid-forties. One of those times that he’s the only one checking people off and he’s holding this conversation that is obviously not about crossing, asking them personal questions. And it’s like, c’mon dude, there’s people here trying to get to work...

While all of the men in the group were asked three questions on average (“Where are you going? What are bringing? What were you doing in Mexico?”), Evelyn was regularly harassed. She later recounted a time when an officer insisted in knowing where she worked. To her surprise, he showed up at her restaurant two hours later saying, “I told you I was going to come visit you.” She didn’t take his table and the next time she crossed he questioned her about not serving him. “Things got weird from there,” she said. But eventually she stopped seeing him at the border, though months later she encountered him again. He asked her, “Did you miss me?”

I asked Evelyn to tell me what a typical exchange with an officer looked like. She said that when she crossed with Damian, she would let him go first because he has a visa and if she got into any trouble she didn’t want them taking it out on him. While she waits her turn she wonders:

*[Sighs] Que me van a preguntar ahora? (What are they going to ask me today?)*  
 ‘How are you doing today?’  
 Fine, just doing the same thing I have to do every day to be able to do whatever I have to do.  
 ‘So, where are you going?’  
 School.  
 ‘What school?’  
 San Diego City College.  
 ‘What are you studying? Blah blah blah’  
 ‘So...what’s up? How are you feeling?’ Or whatever, while they’re inputting my information because my passport’s all fucked up.

There’s some specific border patrol agents that already know me and they say ‘what’s up’ and don’t even check my shit.  
 But there’s some that will go ask uncomfortable questions  
*Por que vives en Tijuana? (Why do you live in Tijuana?)*  
 I can’t afford to live in SD.  
 ‘Why not? You could just use your looks, this and this and that and you could marry someone and you wouldn’t have to worry.’  
 I’m just thinking, you sexist piece of shit.  
 ‘Oh, don’t take it the wrong way. I’m just saying you should take advantage while you still can.’  
 Can I go now? I have a to catch a trolley, and they let me go.

But sometimes when it gets really intense and they keep asking, ‘Why don’t you get a better job? Why don’t you do this? Why don’t you do that,’ because they’re pushing your buttons, to see how far it’ll go.

If you’re trying to send me to secondary, just do it now, I don’t want to keep wasting my breath on people like you.

‘People like me? What do you mean people like me?’

People like you *apellido* [last name] Rodriguez, talking shit to other Mexicans. Where’s your *abuela* [grandma] from, *wey* [dude]?

‘Ooh you’re trying to say I’m racist?’

No, if you feel like a racist that’s cause something’s going up in there. And they get really offended.

Can I just go? I’m tired of talking to you. I don’t want to look at your face anymore. And they’ll let me go

And then Damian will be like, ‘*Que te dijeron?*’ (What did they say?)

It happens so often.

Not every interaction with CBP involves harassment, but for Evelyn many do. In these instances officers abuse their authority while Evelyn asserts hers as a U.S. citizen by “talking shit to them.” These are disruptive performances because they are off script, because Evelyn refuses the subservient role of de facto/potential criminal. In her mind—and without the baggage that comes with growing up at the border—she has the same rights as the officer by virtue of their shared citizenship, allowing her to challenge and disrupt the border crossing ritual theatre.

By comparison, border crossers from Tijuana, especially those without citizenship, are forced to accept an inferior status vis-à-vis the CBP agent. This inferiority is both established and reinforced through coerced waiting, where the crosser’s time holds little value compared to the time of the state, embodied as the agent. The ability to make someone wait—to such extremes, no less—is itself a way of asserting dominance and superiority over the waiting party. I have something you need or want and thus you will be willing to wait for it. Or, I have something you need or want *because* you are willing to wait for it. Repetitive waiting thus also exaggerates or magnifies the value of the U.S. state and the country’s affordances. The excessive effort spent in waiting to cross, the inverse relationship of value

between the crosser's vs. the state's time, combined with the desired object's scarcity (documented access is a privilege), amplifies both the value of the U.S. and the inferiority of the border crosser, underlining their respective dominant/submissive roles. As Hage (2009) argues, the sense of "stuckedness" has become normalized, experienced as an inevitability, and has transformed waiting into a kind of endurance test, where 'waiting it out' becomes "celebration of one's capacity to stick it out rather than calling for change" (p. 97). Waiting then not only reinforces the border crosser's inferior status, temporal submission fosters complacency.

Turner's (1967, 1969) work on liminality—the transformative marginal/threshold period in rites of passage—presents a useful model for exploring the ritualistic aspects of border crossing.<sup>14</sup> To start with, Turner posits the liminal phase is characteristically unstructured, as it exists somewhere between and outside of the social structure where the ritual is taking place. It is minimally structured in two ways, however. First, through the complete authority of the ritual 'instructor'—here, the CBP agent—and the complete submission of the 'neophyte'—here, the border crosser. The authority of the CBP agent as instructor stems from a trust in tradition, that is to say a trust in the community (or society, or system) as a whole, where the instructor comes to represent tradition itself. Because this liminal phase exists as an ambiguous, uncertain, and therefore threatening state, obedience to tradition during this period is absolute. Turner says of "liminal *personae*" or "threshold people,"

Their behavior is normally passive or humble; they must obey their instructors implicitly, and accept arbitrary punishment without complaint. It is as though they

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<sup>14</sup> The 'rites of passage' as articulated by Arnold van Gennep come with any change of state, position, etc. in life and are characterized by three phases: 1) separation, 2) margin/limen, and 3) aggregation. Turner theorizes phase two.

are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life. (1969, p. 95)

The pains of forced and prolonged waiting, sexual harassment, verbal abuse, intimidation, and other ‘oppressive’ maltreatments inflicted on the neophyte crosser are a kind of hazing under this framework. The tearing down of the border crosser is a prerequisite to his transformation into a higher status. “Liminality implies that the high could not be high unless the low existed, and he who is high must experience what it is like to be low” (Turner, 1969, p. 97). Many border crossers experience this sacrifice beyond the Linea, as they enter a new country with a distinct racial and class order that places the Mexican—specially the dark skinned, non-fluent, non-citizen—in a lower social strata. These kinds of new negotiations take place on the street, at school, at the mall, and on the job—often an un-prestigious, low-paying one. But upon returning to Mexico with dollars, skills, education, the crosser’s social standing is suddenly transformed, having gained social and economic capital. The higher status is therefore achieved by virtue of crossing, not by the moment of crossing. The third phase of aggregation splits at the border, and is fully complete only when the crosser returns to Mexico.

The surrender of the neophyte is essential to the transformation. Turner describes the liminal person as existing “at once no longer classified and not yet classified” (1967, p. 96). As de-structured, no longer classifiable beings, neophytes are symbolically associated with death, while as pre-structured, not yet classified beings, they are associated with birth. Thus, imagery that intertwines these opposite themes of death/rebirth into one (such the snake or the moon) is prevalent in rituals because it characterizes “the peculiar unity of the liminal: that which is neither this nor that, and yet is both” (1967, p. 99)—a chiasm. The

crosser neophyte must suffer a metaphorical death to be reconstituted anew; they must cross the Line of death. Loss is necessary, without it, how could the crosser appreciate his wealth? Loss depletes the body, but fills it up in other ways. Being reduced to the ground also enables the group to establish its authority over the subject, to imprint its traditions and knowledge on him.

The neophyte in liminality must be a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, on which is inscribed the knowledge and wisdom of the group, in those respects that pertain to the new status. The ordeals and humiliations, often of a grossly physiological character, to which neophytes are submitted represent partly a destruction of the previous status and partly a tempering of their essence in order to prepare them to cope with their new responsibilities and restrain them in advance from abusing their new privileges. They have to be shown that in themselves they are clay or dust, mere matter, whose form is impressed upon them by society. (1969, p. 103).

Relatedly, the liminal period entails putting neophytes in contact with a deity or a kind of limitless power, as a way of securing allegiance and future submission. Waiting in line is the part of the 'ordeal.' along the way, the neophyte crosser is expected to suffer and leave or lose something of themselves—if not everything—behind. You walk through caged metal walkways, watched by a thousand surveillance camera eyes, encounter trained beasts, intrusive gadgets, pass multiple security gates before reaching the main initiation hall. The initiation has already begun. These technological monsters are meant to inspire fear, awe, faith, and respect for the U.S. state. This is an education, the imparting and acquisition of an arcane knowledge, "the communication of the *sacra*, the heart of the liminal matter" through a straightforward yet densely layered showing, doing, and telling (Turner, 1967, p. 102). The abstracted grandiosities of a technologically advanced state are designed to put the border

crosser neophyte closer to the infinite power that is the United States of America. The supremacy of the nation, wasteful excess; its all part of the ‘American way.’

But the critical test, the pinnacle of the border crossing ritual takes place in the threshold of the inspection booth: the interrogation by the CBP agent. This is a threshold within a threshold, a layered liminality. Before facing the instructor, you stop talking, suddenly alert. You “prepare to keep your cool,” or “forget about everything and think [you’re] about to be standing in front of a federal officer.” A blank slate. You put your mask on; you step halfway outside yourself an attempt to see yourself through the agent’s eyes. The CBP instructor asks you questions he already knows the answer to, questions you already know he’s going to ask, to which you respond in turn. The border crossing document prop is another monstrous abstraction. It disintegrates you into a million data points, making you nothing, making you infinite. Killing you in exchange for your life. Sometimes the agent intimidates or threatens you, other times the instructor is kind, but its all part of the theatre. The interrogation is the initiation. This is an exchange you’ve been previously taught, one you relearn and practice every day. Despite its repetitive and ordinary (even banal) nature, the exchange remains a ritual, one that needs to be *performed*; your ability to cross depends on this.

In contrast to the absolute inequality between the instructor and neophyte, the liminal state is structured such that it produces absolute equality between neophytes. Neophytes become a community by virtue of their lack and shared status. To recall Tito summed up the sense of community between neophyte border crossers this way:

There’s something that happens automatically with all of the people there, something that bonds them. Everyone is experiencing the same thing. Nobody wants to be there. Everyone has probably been doing this for years and they all know how it works. So you immediately relate to people. That’s why more stuff happens on foot, because you’re right there literally [next to people].

Crossers share an instinctive bond because of their physical proximity. They are *pegaditos* (glued together). They share the ritualistic pain and metaphorical death, waiting, moving and not moving together. When crossing the border, their bodies synchronize, sharing what Merleau-Ponty called the elemental “Flesh,” becoming one, so that “everyone is experiencing the same thing.” Neophytes crossing by car don’t share this camaraderie. Their physical separation—individuation—creates enough distance to establish more adversarial attitudes. Furthermore, the differentiation produced by the ‘fast passes’ sold by the U.S. state (Sentri, Fast Lanes, All traffic) is more pronounced when crossing by car. Between neophyte border crossing drivers there is division rather than unity, despite shared experience. Perhaps drivers are performing the border crossing ritual better, more fully transitioning, growing, and embodying the U.S. state sacra.

All border crosser neophytes’ shared condition is their “structural ‘invisibility’”—the essentially unstructured yet cohesive nature of being in-between: *that which is neither this nor that, and yet is both*. This ambiguous state, as Mary Douglas notes, is polluting. Border crossers’ “structural invisibility” is at odds with the hyper-visibility (legibility) demanded by a border surveillance system. The interrogation and inspection booth then represent a corrective and cleansing threshold. The border here is the “frontline” that sorts and endeavors to classify messy and polluting people, turning away or imprisoning (quarantining?) those who just won’t fit between the lines. The modern border crossing ritual is ever more sophisticatedly becoming one of U.S. national purification.

But that is not the whole story. In Tijuana, new migrants, *deportados*, refugees, people who are homeless, poor, as well as all of those who escape their lives daily in bars, casinos, and the streets also exist as liminal personae. They are structurally and often physically invisible, shadows of humanity, at times surviving between literal lines of life and death, an



increasingly dominant condition across the world. This is truly the monstrous side of “liminality,” the monstrosity in ‘border.’

The other border monsters, those robots designed to impress and intimidate us, can actually teach us. Turner points out the sacra is communicated during the liminal phase in part through a breaking down, shocking reconfiguration, and later thoughtful re-configuration of important life elements. To exaggerate, distort, or misshape a familiar object or element is a way of abstracting it, thus exposing the unseen or ‘invisible’ parts that structure our worlds. In this way, Turner explains monsters are invented to function as pedagogical tools, as “[they] startle neophytes into thinking about objects, persons, relationships, and features of their environment they have hitherto taken for granted”(1967, p. 105). In this way, “during the liminal period, neophytes are alternately forced and encouraged to think about their society, their cosmos, and the powers that generate and sustain them. *Liminality may be partly described as a stage of reflection*” (1967, p. 105). As the case of ritual border crossings shows, the forced engagement with state control and surveillance technological excess and spectacle inadvertently prompts crosser reflection and structural critique. More generally, the Linea as an in-between stage also has the power to “startle” us, for monsters in a liminal space fall between the lines, not outside of them. *La Linea* can teach us to notice the monstrous in our everyday, rather than seeing the monstrous as aberrant.

## Conclusion

Make an inventory of you pockets, of your bag. Ask yourself about the provenance, the use, what will become of each of the objects you take out.

Question your teaspoons.

What is there under your wallpaper?

How many movements does it take to dial a phone number?

Why don't you find cigarettes in grocery stores? Why not?

It matters little to me that these questions should be fragmentary, barely indicative of a method, at most of a project. It matters a lot to me that they should seem trivial and futile: that's exactly what makes them just as essential, if not more so, as all the other questions by which we've tried in vain to lay hold on our truth.

--Georges Perec, *The Infra-ordinary*

In October of 1974, writer Georges Perec spent three days observing Place Saint-Sulpice in Paris in an effort of complete description. His intention was to focus not on the things often held to be significant such as history, architecture, or social structures, but on the rest, on what he named the “infra-ordinary”—“that which is generally not taken note of, that which is not noticed, that which has no importance: what happens when nothing happens” (1975/2010, p. 3). *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris* is a strange little book. Perec moves around the square sitting in cafés, stores, and benches for hours, writing down everything he sees in front of him with strikingly detached detail.

At first glance, his text reads like the neurotic jottings of a naturalist ethnographer. “Rue Bonaparte, a cement mixer, orange. A basset hound. A man with a bow tie. An 86. The wind is making the leaves on the trees move. A 70.” Each movement from one place to the next includes a heading noting the date, time, location, and weather. The entire exercise is filled with smaller efforts to classify his observations into several categories: numbers, letters, symbols, trajectories, colors, means of carrying, body positions, differences from one day to the next, umbrella types; all as way of describing more, more quickly. In his hurried writing, one senses the inherent frustration in trying to communicate the totality of experience, the everyday that refuses to be seized. He writes, “(obvious limits to such an undertaking: even when my only goal is to observe, I don’t see what takes place a few meters from me: I don’t notice, for example, that cars are parking)” (p. 15). Vision is limited, time keeps passing, things keep moving, his writing, bounded by time, becomes a measure of time.

Perec understood his attempt to see and write down everything was futile, and knowing his experiment would be unsuccessful, he did it anyway. The process itself revealed what his exaggerated empiricism couldn’t contain: he meditates on his “impression” of an empty square with the twenty people filling it; he tunes into the city rhythms, noting pauses,

lulls, his own fatigue, and eventually realizes he ‘counts’ buses because “they cut up time” and “punctuate the background noise,” they remain stable against the chaotic (p. 22); he notices a stranger holds his cigarette as he does, as he’s never seen anyone else do; he says hello to friends that pass by. Towards the end of the second day, he begins to lose interest and his “unsatisfied curiosity (what I came here to find, the memory floating in this café...)” leads him to see “with a menacing eye” and a “weary vision” (p. 33). But just as quickly his own line of questioning leads him to write “to see not just the rips, but the fabric (but how to see the fabric if it is only the rips that make it visible: no one ever sees buses pass by unless they’re waiting for one, or unless they’re waiting for someone to come off of one, or unless the Paris City Transport Authority pays them a salary to count them...)” (p. 33-34).

His third and final day there, a rainy Sunday, is much shorter in length and holds a palpable dreariness. Perec continues the descriptive task at hand. The phrase “I’m eating a Camembert sandwich” is silly yet steeped in an unknowable sorrow, the only time he describes his own actions with the same distance he’s treated the rest, a moment of dispassionate self observation. He is briefly enlivened when he loses himself in sight noting how “by looking at only a single detail, for example, rue Ferrou, and for a sufficiently long period of time (one or two minutes), one can, without difficulty, imagine that one is in Étampes or in Bourges, or even, moreover, in some part of Vienna (Austria) where I’ve never been” (p. 46). This reflection passes as quickly as it arrived and Perec ends his text with an unremarkable conclusion.

Perec’s attempt at totality inevitably came up against the limitations of his medium and body. Seeing much less recording everything is an impossible task. There are always limits to perception and understanding. But what’s most interesting about Perec’s work is his insistence on noticing how and what we notice—the ways we notice. He was disturbed by

the general disregard of the everyday, how it came to be assumed obvious and therefore insignificant, so he questioned the things that were assumed to be important by default. In his writings on the infra-ordinary he wrote, “we live [the habitual] without thinking, as if it carried within it neither questions nor answers, as if it weren’t the bearer of any information. This is no longer even conditioning, it’s anesthesia. We sleep through our lives in a dreamless sleep. But where is our life? Where is our body? Where is our space?” (1989/2008, p. 210). His attention to detail was a way of reclaiming the body and the sensible and to demand we remain curious of our environment and experience in the world. His are literary experiments on sight, perception, time and space. Though relying on empirical observation, Perec’s project is not positivist; it’s more like “bad” anthropology, where he tries to adopt a pre-theoretical stance that won’t automatically filter observations according to conventional notions of significance and irrelevance.<sup>1</sup>

After all, his desire for wholeness was rooted in this recurring and shared desire “to see not just the rips, but the fabric,” to see the invisible mesh that holds and organizes our world in the ways that it visibly does. And as he too recognizes, there lies the paradox, because only through its visible rips can the invisible fabric be seen. Faced with this, Perec’s method isn’t one of evocation or suggestion, but the complete opposite: it’s one of intense and ‘pure’ observation, not of the extra-ordinary, but of the infra-ordinary—what lies beneath the ordinary, the essence of the everyday, the visible unseen. It’s only by bringing the banal to such extreme focus that it can reveal, as it becomes exhausted, used up, and empty, such that it’s unable to hide the invisible anymore. The visible is not the self-evident

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<sup>1</sup> MacDougall’s (1998) writing on visual detail, appearance, and transculturality comes to mind here. “Consider having to write, every time you mention a person, that he or she walked on two legs, had a head, a face, two arms, and so on. Yet every visual image of a person explicitly and redundantly shows this” (p. 246). Images invert our usual ways of doing anthropology, in them “culture is perceived as the background, rather than the figure of human relationships” (p. 258).

layer we need to peel back to reveal deeper invisible truths. Only by examining it with curiosity and in detail—by not taking it for granted—can we get glimpses of the invisible and grasp some of its meaning. *There is no vision without the screen*. Extreme focus on a single detail—as he writes on the third day when he travels with his imagination—is what can result in transcendence.<sup>2</sup> Or, as Ingold (2008) observed, “the singular phenomenon opens up as you go deeper into it, rather than being eclipsed from above” (p. 75). Going in, opens up (or maybe down, or sideways). “Exhausting” is thus in fact a double movement that is not only about depletion, but about refill and renewal. These opposite movements are what lend Perec’s work an unexpected surreal quality. As the text’s translator notes, his “focused empirical attention on what we take for granted can have disquieting effects” (Lowenthal in Perec, p. 52).

Though with a different approach, this project shares in this Perecquian spirit. This dissertation is my own *attempt at exhausting a place in Tijuana*, because only by exhausting the place that exhausted me for so many years can I convince myself there’s justice in the world. Yes, I’m talking about taking revenge on a place. I have to admit this project is guided, at least in part, by this ignoble motivation. This project is part rebellious outcry against *la Línea*—a relic of an adolescent past when I felt voiceless and beholden to forces above and beyond my control, undoubtedly, but also a natural expression of rage against the minor and sweeping injustices that can be witnessed at the border every day. And yet this project is also part homage to it, because it’s made me who I am and, like others said here, to despise it would be to despise a part of myself. In the end my border rage is not only rooted in ideals of justice, but in the kind of naïve love one has for “home” after one leaves it, knowing that to return means finding home was never there to begin with.

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<sup>2</sup> Merleau-Ponty’s unfinished text “The Visible and the Invisible” also discussed these two qualities as “immanence” and “transcendence.”

Still, above all, my attempt at exhausting the *Linea* was an excuse to continue obsessively chipping away at all of these feelings, memories, impressions, sights and sounds, to sort out what ‘fabric’ all of these thread-lines form, where they originate and where they may lead. I was born in the spring of 1987 in Salinas, California, a city I have only visited four times since that day. After the task of securing my citizenship was accomplished, my mother left her sister’s house and returned to Tijuana. As many other children still do, I, along with my two older siblings, attended first through twelfth grade in San Diego public schools while “secretly” living in Tijuana.<sup>3</sup> This meant I crossed the border every day I had to go to school. Much later I would ask my mother why she didn’t enroll us in school in Tijuana and she would respond something about opportunities, learning English, and computers. Years after that, I would ask her again and she would say that it just happened that way. At the time, my parents were both practicing dentists and teachers in Tijuana. My mom taught public elementary school, but was planning to enroll us in a private school. Then some friends who lived in San Ysidro, the neighborhood right across the border, offered to share their address. Enrolling us in a U.S. school became the cheaper and better option.

Crossing the border was completely unremarkable until 2001. In the early years before my family owned a washing machine, I would join my mom on trips to the laundromat in San Ysidro, where we would also buy groceries, clothing, and delight in eating fast food. Just like dollars in Tijuana, back then you could pay with pesos in San Ysidro. It took just a few minutes to cross the border; you simply drove or walked past it. I don’t

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<sup>3</sup> See Vargas-Valle (2012) and her joint work with Coubes (2017) for some of the latest demographic sociological work on these northern Mexico resident border crossing practices of expectant mothers delivering their children, and children and young adults attending school in the U.S. A recent public photography project—Borderclick—works with the latter group of ‘trans-border students,’ providing “a digital living archive exploring the complexities of the transborder experience” where students are able to share the photos they take of their daily lives. See: <https://www.instagram.com/borderclick/>

remember it quite this way but older friends always say that in their child's mind, the border wasn't *the border*; it was just another way of getting to a different part of town. But 9/11 made the border a remarkable place for people like me. The endless serpentine lines of thousands of people dutifully waiting before dawn was unlike anything I'd ever seen. I vowed to photograph this impressive sight, but never did. 9/11 meant I had to get up at 3:00 a.m. or 4:00 a.m. to wait in line for at least six hours to arrive late to school. The agency that would soon become CBP placed multiple metal detectors, X-ray machines, barriers, and electronic signs inside the customs building prominently announcing the day's level of "terrorist threat" with colors. We took it seriously at first. There was talk of the importance of San Diego's navy and military bases, the possibility of terrorists targeting them, talk that soon grew to include the Linea as a potential target. More than fearful, I think it made us feel special to imagine the Linea on some foreigner's list of places worth terrorizing, the drudgery of our lives suddenly elevated to the sphere of global import. The more pragmatic among us observed the daily 'threat' colors, believing they could provide insight into how long it would take to cross. But when the colors remained only either red or orange, the whole thing became a big unfortunate joke. We quickly grew tired of the charades or got used to them, realizing they were here to stay. Things would eventually settle down, meaning waiting two to three hours to cross would become the norm. Much has changed since then, but the wait has remained the same.

I loathed this commute and schemed different ways to escape it, from reading fiction, to doing homework while waiting in line, to fantasizing I actually lived in San Diego, to skipping class, to developing half-baked plans to drop out of school altogether. But in the end I continued to cross like this for four years to finish high school. With a return trip of two hours, it felt like I spent most of my time in transit, moving "back and forth". And in a



way this was true, because I spent most of this time in my head, which meant this was the most time I spent with myself. My last year in school, when I realized I would be moving away to go to college, my waiting took on a more melancholy tone. I wasn't going to miss crossing the border (not even close), but I sensed my existential ruminations were attached to this place; I wouldn't be able to take them all with me. I would have to leave a lot behind and as a result much would remain unresolved. I knew then this experience was as meaningful as it had been agonizing, and I daydreamed ways of articulating this to myself and to the world.

So I've had to return to the scene of the crime, so to speak, to *volver a andar lo andado*—to walk what I've already walked and wait what I've already waited—in order to investigate what this was all about. In hindsight it makes sense I would land on this notion of *revolver*, a word that too aptly describes my mental state during the entirety of this project. This is indeed a text where I have *revolvered* many ideas precisely in an attempt to *unrevolver*, to unscramble, so much of what has been going on in my head. Returning home has meant revisiting and reshaping all of these memories and past experiences while making new ones. This work has made me look to where I came from, where I am now, and where I might go, all at the same time. In large part, then, this project is also a meditation on the meaning and the place of home, the palimpsestic and cyclical qualities of time, and the ways some places have a hold on us. Sometimes places trap us, other times we let ourselves get caught.

*La Linea* for me has been a series of entanglements, filled with confusion and just as much clarity. More than that, the border has shaped how I see and experience the world. My hope in writing this dissertation is that in the process of sorting out some of the issues I've struggled with for some time, I discovered things that are also worthwhile and meaningful for others.

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## Appendix A

*“La Línea”*

A song by Damian “Fry” (2015)

I recorded Damian performing his *Línea* song in an alley in Tijuana. Below are the lyrics and my translation. The video is attached to this dissertation’s digital folder. You may also follow this link to view it: <https://vimeo.com/170713626>

*Viendo hacia el sol eterno  
hasta quedarme ciego  
Y no hay frío en verano  
para hecharte de menos*

Looking at the eternal sun  
until I go blind  
There’s no cold in the summer  
to miss you

*Que culpa tener  
dejar de querer*

No fault having  
to stop wanting

*La gente corre y corre a prisa  
y me jala la camisa*

People run, run in a hurry  
they pull on my shirt

*Viendo el reloj de frente  
hasta perder la mente  
Y no hay tiempo que sobre  
que pase lentamente*

Seeing the clock in front  
until I lose my mind  
There’s no time left  
to pass slowly

*Desesperación  
No poder llegar*

Despair  
Unable to arrive

*La gente corre y corre a prisa  
y me jala la camisa*

People run, run in a hurry  
they pull on my shirt

## Appendix B

### Lulú's Story

This text briefly details Lourdes' life as she recounted it to me when I first met her, and includes other elements I learned as we spent more time together. I recently shared this writing with Lulú and she edited it as she saw fit. I couldn't help but insert myself in footnotes to mention other stories and to provide more details about her leaving the Linea.

Lourdes was thirty-two when she came to visit her uncle, her Tío Emeterio, in Tijuana with her youngest son and her husband in 1993. Her uncle owned two *artesanía* shops and a *lonchería* and was one of the founders of the *Mercado*, since the 1960s he had been a *comerciante* at the Línea. She came from Zapopan, Jalisco, like many of the other vendors who migrated from southern Mexico.<sup>1</sup> Many of the *artesanías* sold at the border are brought from vendors' hometowns or states, Tonalá, Jalisco, the state of Morelia, for example.

Lourdes says she came to visit for a few days and ended up staying her whole life.<sup>2</sup> She told me she'd come to visit her Tío in Tijuana thinking here she'd be able to make a living more easily because it was the border, and that she'd be able to visit some of her family in Chicago. But as the days passed, she made an agreement with her uncle to be in charge of the *lonchería*, as he wasn't able to tend to it being busy with his other shops and his plaster figurine-making workshop. Lourdes liked the idea because she doesn't like life in the U.S.; it's all about work and money. Like there is *sacrificada, monótona y esclavisada* (full of sacrifices, monotonous, and enslaving). She wanted to be free and have her own business and try her luck like part of her family did here in Tijuana.

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<sup>1</sup> Many of the 'founding' vendors come from the states of Jalisco, Queretaro, and Guanajuato. A family member would land in the Linea on their way to the U.S. or on their way back home from the U.S., only to get 'stuck' there making lots of money. Eventually they would send for the rest of their nuclear, even extended family.

<sup>2</sup> This was a common refrain among vendors. One union leader, who had arrived at age eleven and had worked at the border for fifty years, mentioned they lived without a broom for a long time in their house because "*mañana nos regresamos a Tonalá*" (we'll return to Tonalá tomorrow). This kind of Linea time is also one of expectation, looking to the future, or getting stuck in the present. This was also why his father didn't accept the piece of land in the then outskirts of town someone was giving him for free. His family was coming to Tijuana only for a day. Every household needs a broom in Mexico. Sweeping, especially the front of the house—wherever this front or entrance may be—is a daily ritual. This union leader underscores the family's certainty of a quick return to Jalisco through the absence of the broom more than the decline of free land. From the 1970s into the 1980s when most of the founding Mercado families arrived to Tijuana, selling souvenirs and *artesanías* at the border was extremely lucrative. So much so that landing in the Linea during this period derailed anyone's plan to migrate (or return) to the U.S.—the reason they had come to Tijuana in the first place. A vendor explained it this way, why would I go break my back working all day in the fields in California or Washington to make less money than I would here in less than an hour?

Another vendor who was newer to Tijuana described the city as a place 'that keeps calling you back. And you just keep coming back, I don't know why.' Three times he had unsuccessfully tried to cross into the U.S. without papers. But maybe it's fine because my brother who lives in the States has changed, now all he cares about is money, he said. Still, he didn't like Tijuana very much. There's too many vices and too much crime; these things entrap people, maybe they will do the same with my kids when they grew up. And yet after he and his wife returned to their home state of Queretaro, they only stayed for a year, deciding to return to Tijuana. 'Tijuana feels more like home now.'

Ask anyone not from Tijuana who has lived in the city for a few decades and you'll get a similar story. "I was just visiting," "I was only coming for a year," "I was just passing through, making my way to \_\_\_\_ in the U.S." Local lore says drinking water from La Presa (the city dam) ensures you will never leave the city.

When she started renting her uncle's *loncheria*, she sent for her two other children to rejoin the family. Lourdes would send her kids to take orders and do deliveries all around the Linea and even as far as the Plaza Viva Tijuana near downtown. This Plaza used to be full of activity, but has sat mostly abandoned since 2000. It's now reactivating after the new checkpoint of El Chaparral opened in 2016.

Later, they opened another business at the Línea—“Abarrotes Don Charly”—named after her husband, the same convenience store her family ran for twenty-three years. In the beginning, other vendors were annoyed they were doing so well and did all kinds of *maldades* outside of their shops out of envy. They were the first in the Linea to sell the famous *tostilocos*. They also won recognition for being number one in the world in Coca-Cola Zero sales when the product was first released. In the early 2000s, her husband passed away and she and her children were left to take care of the family business. “Abarrotes Don Charly” is where I would first meet her and her youngest son Jorge.

Lourdes' parents and nine siblings are still living in Zapopan where she visits them twice a year. Her mother is 87 years old and her father turned 101 in 2017. She has three children and three grandchildren.

Upon leaving the Linea,<sup>3</sup> Lourdes and her youngest son opened up an Internet café in *Colonia Libertad* that was ultimately unsuccessful. She has since remarried and now continues her work as an activist full time, promoting culture and defending migrant rights. Lulú will soon come out with a book narrating twenty-two years of service in support of the cause.

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<sup>3</sup> In 2015, after the *Puerta Mexico* bridge that was once the architecturally lauded entrance and exit of Linea traffic was demolished, with the promise of the same happening to the *Mercado*, and in the face of extremely low sales, Lourdes decided to sell her shop. She was heart-broken, but feared she would not be able to sell if she waited more time and complained other vendors were not fighting to keep the *Mercado*. “*La Línea se acabó*,” she declared. The Linea has ended. The Linea is finished. The Linea has run out. The border that once provided bounty, helping her put her kids through school, even college, had dried up. According to her, the Linea was suffering a “*muerte súbita*,” a sudden death. However difficult it was to accept its death, she saw it was time to move on, so she ‘got out,’ ‘*se salió de la Línea*.’

## Appendix C

### Evelyn's Story

Evelyn recently moved to Oregon because she said she was tired of having her life revolve around the border and she wanted to explore other possibilities. The following text is a compilation of several emails where Evelyn tells her life story. I've rearranged details chronologically and have [edited] some parts for coherence.

My dad's family is originally from Tayoltita, Durango...a small town. My dad left home due to abuse and other psychological stresses from my grandmother when he was 12 or 13 and made it up North to Tijuana where he first started working as an *ayudante* [helper] to a man who sold tortas in downtown Tijuana. Then he got a job in a parking lot parking cars, then other little jobs like that until eventually he became a *pollero* [migrant smuggler] for almost 15 years. When he started making bank he sent for my grandma and his younger siblings and my grandpa. They settled in colonia Union in Soler [neighborhood in Tijuana]. My dad always took care of everyone. It's fucked up how when he no longer was making the money he used to he was discarded as a family member from the people who he helped practically raise. I have aunts and uncles from my dad's side who obtained citizenship or residency and live in the states, all in California.

My parents tell us that they both agreed that if they were to have kids they would have them in the U.S. to improve our chances of opportunity as a family and for us two (their kids) as individuals. My parents moved to El Sereno [neighborhood in East Los Angeles, California]. They (well, I guess WE, I was kinda there too) moved into the guesthouse of a long-time friend of my dad's, I think it's near El Monte just outside L.A. when my mom was 38 weeks pregnant. They got across the border with just their visas and said they were going to visit family, or shopping...I don't remember how that part of the story goes.

We were doing fine. I was *chiqueada* [spoiled] as fuck because I was the little baby in the house and there were teens and young adults in the house who were children of my dad's friend and they would play with me, watch movies with me, take me to the park, sneak me candy and things like that. The sense of family and community was strong in that house. But eventually my dad felt that my mom and I deserved our own space, our own home. He sent my mom and I to Sinaloa with my maternal grandmother so my dad could work his butt off until we had our own place to call home. It was 2 years, almost 3 when my mom and I were back in the States. My dad would come visit every couple of months bringing my mom lots of *chacharas* [knickknacks] to sell in the neighboring pueblos to help us out while he was doing his own thing. My mom is a fantastic vendor. My dad says each time he'd drive back to Tijuana it'd be the hardest thing to deal with leaving his new baby and wife behind because he felt we deserved better than what we had in El Sereno. My parents were in L.A. for many years, I can't imagine how the transition to Mexico was for them. It's something I've never really talked about with them, whenever the subject comes up they focus on what was taken away from my sister and I, they never talk about what was taken from them, too.

I had a happy childhood. I know my parents struggled to keep my dad's auto shop open and not have to be exploited (physically, emotionally with threats to call immigration from the management, and mentally with having to put their kids in day cares if they didn't work from home and run the risk of having their children abused in any way) by some *fabrica* en South Central L.A. or on Florence Blvd. towards El Centro. When I was 4, my younger sister came into the picture and I was so happy to have someone to play with, someone to pass wisdom on to, someone to fight for when shit goes down, someone to watch cartoons with who will get why I find things so funny, someone who will be my best friend forever, someone who to this day seems to be taking more care of me than I am of her. She's 20 years old, turning 21 in November and she is going to school at City College (which I found to be such a trip that I would run into my

baby sister on campus, it was a very euphoric trip) and working as a hostess at a Mexican restaurant in Old Town San Diego. My mom was always a stay at home mom until we came to Tijuana and she and my dad opened their shop. I went to school and had few friends, was social when I had to be and loved them backyard punk shows!

In December 2008, my father was deported to Tijuana from L.A. I was 16 years old at the time. The transition was unexpected and my father insisted I stay in L.A. with an aunt to finish up high school but I didn't want to be away from them, mostly because my aunt is a religious nut. A month after my father was detained he was released at the San Ysidro border into Tijuana and a few days later we arrived with all of our stuff in a huge truck my mother rented.

The first home we arrived in was my (now deceased) grandmother, which is in La Cardenas [neighborhood in Tijuana]. When we moved out on our own we moved up the street. Then we moved another two times, about 4-6 blocks was the parameter of houses I lived in my 10 years in Tijuana, all in La Cardenas. My father's side of the family was the family who took us in. But since they realized my dad was no longer "ballin' with American dollars" they slowly started to push us away to very disappointing extremes.

My parents were quick to get income going, they set up a *piñata* shop at home and have been growing since. My younger sister had a harder time adjusting than I did. I was depressed for the first 4 months but then I heard about a punk show going on downtown one Saturday night and I said, "Fuck it." and I went and that night I met people who I am still friends with.

Eventually I finished up my high school credits online by November 2009 and I was crossing almost every other day, or whenever I could gather money for the buses to get me to the border, to San Ysidro, dropping off applications at the various retail stores in the area. FINALLY in October 2010 I was hired at my old job, IHOP [in San Ysidro] and things got a little better financially, we (as a family) weren't struggling as much anymore. I was working as a server making 11 USD per hour plus tips. A regular bi-weekly paycheck would come out to about \$220-\$240 and every weekend I'd make about an average of 100 USD in tips working Friday-Sunday morning shifts.

My first semester at City [San Diego City College] began June 2014. I was there until January 2017. After being done with school for almost 6 years and hating the customer service life, I decided to give college a try because I felt like if I didn't I was gonna be the next veteran waitress at IHOP. It also brought a sense of purpose to me because at the time I felt like I was in a downward spiral not only with my job but with my outside activities, I was drinking a lot and I have had more self-control since I got back into the student [life]. I haven't taken a break from any semester [including the] summer since I enrolled. I enrolled as undecided and then eventually picked a Spanish major then failed a Spanish for native speakers class then switched my major to Sociology because the few courses I had taken on the subject ignited my rage and desire to dismantle capitalism, patriarchal ideology, classism, racism and challenge social norms in general. I am now attending Portland Community College still as a Sociology major. I moved here with my partner, Tony, because I was tired of planning my life around the Tijuana/San Ysidro border and wanted to explore other opportunities to counter the stagnant routine I had in Tijuana. I don't really know what the future holds. I have been living in Portland for almost two months now and I don't see myself here for a very long time. Maybe I'll finish my Bachelor's now that I have time to take more classes and not waste 6-8 hours a day in transportation and border wait time. But I hope to obtain a degree in Sociology and do something with that. I'm currently working as a budtender in a recreational marijuana dispensary, which is cool and all, but I don't wanna be a veteran here either...