

Session 2. The aesthetics of border demarcation, from border landscape to border artscapes / *L'esthétique des inscriptions frontalières, paysage et art à la frontière (1)*

Kenneth MADSEN, The Ohio State University at Newark: Contesting and Claiming Space at the Edges of the Nation-State.

On the edges of the nation-state, border fences have become an increasingly popular political mechanism for controlling flows of people and goods, but this medium has also become a canvas for alternative expressions of belonging. Just as art and graffiti are commonly deployed in the urban landscape as mainstream and alternative means of claiming space, they are deployed on international border fences to contest prevalent political winds and claim alternative senses of who belongs. In particular, such endeavors often give voice to marginalized populations that are kept at bay by border barriers or local populations that transcend the boundary. This research takes the U.S.-Mexico border as a case study in understanding such activity.

Sara SOLAIMANI, San Diego State University: Culture, art, and the transborder condition/experience: Marcos Ramirez ERRE's artistic practices.

I completed my Graduate study at San Diego State University's Chicana and Chicano Studies Department, for which the title of my thesis is Culture, Art, and the Transborder condition/experience: Marcos Ramirez ERRE's Art Practices. In it, I explore Marcos Ramirez ERRE's work as an instrument for questioning the physical and metaphorical Mexico-US border, and pre-constructed colonial notions of space on a global scale. In relation to notions of identity on the border, how has this questioning led to a naturalization of the collective and fluid condition made up of distinct transborder experiences?

For the purposes of this proposal, I'll focus on developing briefly the main concepts of my research, delving deeply into one of the analytical category in depth so as to rethink the perceived limitations of subjectivities or conditions. Although borders are "real" and painful ruptures for many, individual experiences of life are every bit as "real," and are therefore meaningful naturalizing in order to make it easier to operationalize them as methods to collect individual transborder experiences and manifest them as understandings of the other. Art practices can recuperate the others within by revealing the undeniable individuality of combinations of circumstances in each of our narratives.

By isolating from the analysis, specific sections that demonstrate how three of the nine pieces analyzed in detail, have questioned paradigmatic notions of identity vis-à-vis the geopolitical Mexico-US border, I aim to highlight the way in which this artistic production is in turn, naturalizing the transborder condition (Iglesias Prieto 2008). ERRE's work has added an important element of deliberate agency to this asymmetrically structured region in which survival is contingent upon innovation.

ERRE's work plays an important cultural role of raising awareness about the transborder condition. Inspired by the spirit of Iglesias Prieto's operational dedication to define the global transborder condition that marks the lives of many, I re-appropriate the concept for the purposes of this research. Transborder indicates a position of being present between two worlds. It is a collective product of distinct transborder experiences—crossings for myriad purposes that require careful consideration and negotiation of the border, that necessarily entail creativity and strategy—

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inevitably affected by its physical construct, its imposition. Sophisticated concepts require equally sophisticated manifestations, expressions. Art is an ideal vehicle for questioning the illusion of permanence of our constructed physical reality (Ramirez 2006, Hicks 1998).

Appreciating the complexity of border dynamics requires intricately woven foundations made of equally complex theories of human subjectivity. 187 Pairs of Hands photographically leveled the playing field for California workers in response to Proposition 187 that denied basic rights to the undocumented. Road to Perdition held up a mirror to show where we are headed with the colonial pattern of imposing war on others. In line with Arjun Appadurai's ethnoscapas and Benedict Anderson's diasporas, ERRE uses his own transborder subjectivity to show that the border affects the transborder subject regardless of his geographic location. Body of Crime questioned the idea of fixed and separate players (identities) in the Mexico-US drug war. 187 Pairs of Hands, Road to Perdition, and Body of Crime illustrate that identity is fluid and complex and that the borders can be questioned onsite and remotely (virtually). Although ERRE's work speaks to a condition of colonial history of creation and enforcement, the pieces also bring an opportunity for clarity, a message of agency that reminds us how fluid and elemental each of our narratives are to understanding environments of encounter.

David TAYLOR, Photographer: Working the Line - Physical, Social and Political topography of the U.S./Mexico Border.



Border Monument No. 4 – © 2008 David Taylor

For the last three years I have been photographing along the U.S.-Mexico border between El Paso/Juarez and Tijuana/San Diego. Ostensibly the project is organized around an effort to document all of the monuments that mark the international boundary west of the Rio Grand. The rigorous effort to reach all of the approximately 260 obelisks, which were installed between 1891 and 1895, has inevitably led to encounters with migrants, smugglers, Border Patrol agents, minutemen and local residents of the borderlands.

The southwest border is a territory in transition. During the period of my work the United States Border Patrol has doubled in size and the federal government has constructed over 600 miles of

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pedestrian fencing and vehicle barrier. With apparatus that range from simple tire drags (that erase foot prints allowing fresh evidence of crossing to be more readily identified) to seismic sensors (that detect the passage of people on foot or in a vehicle) the border is under constant surveillance. To date the Border Patrol has attained “operational control” in many areas, however people and drugs continue to cross. Much of that traffic occurs in the most remote and dangerous areas of the southwest deserts.

My travels along the border have been done both alone and in the company of Border Patrol agents. I have been granted broad access to photograph field operations and the routine activities that occur within Border Patrol stations.

In total, the resulting pictures are intended to offer a view into locations and situations that we generally do not access. In doing so, I hope to offer a view into highly complex set of issues that are most often framed by simplistic, ideologically driven polemics.

My contribution to *The Aesthetics of Border Demarcation* will encompass an overview of my current project, a discussion of the multiple narratives that are the “border issue” and the aesthetic strategies employed in the production of the work. Frequently the U.S. Mexico border is presented as a monolithic phenomenon rather than a complex and variable set of contingent narratives. I will use my photographs as a vehicle to discuss that complexity.

Geneviève CHEVALIER, Université Bishop’s, Université du Québec à Montréal : Mesures de sécurité renforcées à Stanstead au Québec et Derby Line au Vermont, Exposition sur Stanstead.

In this conference, I propose to explore the particular case of the Town of Stanstead, Québec and Derby Line, Vermont, where there has been an increase in security recently. Stanstead is the subject of an exhibition I am curating and which I will discuss in this presentation.

The exhibition “Stanstead Project, or how to cross the border” revolves around the theme of border lines, those which, as architectural artefacts inscribed in the landscape, have an impact on citizens’ mobility. In the last few months, the citizens of Stanstead—the border town in the Eastern Townships that neighbours Derby Line, Vermont—have seen a heightening in border security, manifest in the construction of fences and a growing number of customs officers and arrests. New border policies across the world are having repercussions all the way in Stanstead, where people have routinely crossed the border for generations going back to the late 18th century, some with family members on both sides of it.

Recent history of colonial development in the Eastern Townships begins at the end of the 18th century with the settlement of the first Americans in a region then under British rule. The area served as a buffer zone between Canada and the United States and had not yet been developed. Until 1812, ties remained stronger with Vermont than with the rest of Lower Canada¹. Among the handful of Americans who colonized the area that would later become Stanstead, some did so thinking they were still south of the border. Others were intent on returning to the British fold. The microcosm in the Tomifobia valley prospered, thanks in part to its way station for stage coaches travelling between Montreal and Boston². In recent years—some would say since the paradigm shift of September 11, 2001—, the “curiosity” and “close-knit community” that had

¹ Jean-Pierre Kesteman, Peter Southam, Diane Saint-Pierre, *Histoire des Cantons de l’Est* (Québec: Les presses de l’Université Laval, 1998).

² Matthey Farfan, *The Vermont-Quebec Border: Life on the Line* (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2009).

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defined the border area formed by Stanstead and Derby Line has become a blind spot in Canada-US relations. Events are inexorably pointing in one direction: this enclave will not be the exception to the rule. The demands of national defence and security are disrupting the habits and lifestyles of a community and partially eradicating its history.

This first part of the project, preparatory to the particular case of Stanstead and Derby Line, broaches the general question of the world's boundaries and the nature of the territories they circumscribe. Selected works deal with notions of space, territory, border lines, history, culture, and geography: Andreas Rutkauskas (Montreal) drew from the surroundings of Stanstead to produce photographs, video, and travel logs; Green Border, which Christian Philipp Müller (Berlin and New York) presented at the Venice Biennale in 1993, deals in part with Austria's historical boundaries, and his more recent Burning Love explores the cloth-weaving traditions of a mountain community; Ursula Biemann's Performing the Border and Europlex examine the legitimacy of the borders that neo-capitalism creates between rich nations and poor ones, between men and women.

The reflection thus begun, the exhibition continues in the summer of 2012, as artists Raphaëlle de Groot (Montreal and Italy) and Althea Thauberger (Vancouver) produce site-specific works articulated around Stanstead and its social, cultural, historical, and political contexts.

"Stanstead Project, or how to cross the border" was presented from April 30 to July 30, 2011 at the Foreman Art Gallery of Bishop's University. The project will continue during the Summer of 2012 in the Town of Stanstead.