Josh Kun & Fiamma Montezemolo, eds.

Tijuana Dreaming
Life and Art at the Global Border

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For the phenomena that interest me are precisely those that blur these boundaries, cross them, and make their historical artifice appear, also their violence, meaning the relations of force that are concentrated there and actually capitalize themselves there interminably. —Jacques Derrida, Monolingualism of the Other; or, The Prosthesis of Origin

Back in the days of modern nation building and the accompanying outreach of empire, many lines were drawn in the sand. Invariably straight as a die, oblivious of the social and natural ecologies on the ground, frontiers, borders, and distinctions were drawn up on maps in the Foreign Offices and State Departments of London, Paris, Berlin, and Washington. Much of today's world is witness to the physical and cultural violence of these abstract divisions unilaterally established in distant metropoles. Look at the map. Once out of Europe and the Northern Hemisphere, the modern invention of nation and border is mirrored in straight lines running all over Africa and the Middle East (in Asia older inheritances often deviated that logic). This, too, was the case with the frontier established in Southern California drawn between the United States and Mexico. It runs between the confluence of the Gila and Colorado rivers and the Pacific, and was established after Mexico’s defeat and the subsequent treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. The treaty registered the appropriation of 1.36 million square kilometers of territory by the aggressive northern, slave-owning, imperial neighbor. While the U.S. Army occupied Mexico City, La Intervención Norteamericana led to the incorporation of what is today the southwestern United States: New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, California.

Acts of violence, invariably sanctified by “law,” establish a place, give it a name, and sanctify its authority. In all of these cases, the colonial cut has produced a postcolonial wound. While the Euro-American “winners” who wrote the history of these events (Walter Benjamin) remain self-assured in their political and cultural authority
to define and explain subsequent developments, the “losers,” the defeated, the
subaltern, find themselves invariably operating within spaces and languages
they had rarely chosen. If, according to Heidegger, space acquires significance
only when it is transformed into a particular place, both space and place, as
Henri Lefebvre argued, are never given but always socially produced. So if
from high above the Southern California coastline from Los Angeles to Ti-
juana seemingly represents a unified urban sprawl, oblivious to border legisla-
tion and national confines, close-up we inevitably encounter a very different
story.

Here we discover the power of architecture to carve and articulate the land
in a multiplicity of borders and confines. The power of architecture to mold,
modify, and morph a territory reveals the architecture of power: it is never
merely a technical, neutral, or “scientific” language.

In border zones, such as that between Israel and the Occupied Territories, it
promotes a set of social and historical practices that lead to what Eyal Weiz-
man calls a “laboratory of the extreme” and a “dynamic morphology of the
frontier.” The territory, Weizman continues, is never as flat as a map, but stri-
ated beneath our feet (aquifers, land rights) and above our heads (air corri-
dors, electromagnetic waves full of radio signals, cellular phone networks,
gps positioning, wide-band computer communications). The situation in the
Occupied Territories is exemplary rather than exceptional. Similar procedures
scan the Mediterranean, just as they patrol the U.S.-Mexico border. Maps are
multiple, simultaneously vertical and horizontal: a three-dimensional matrix.
They produce flexible, mobile frontiers that sustain invisible lines and shift-
ing configurations of material and immaterial territory. So frontiers are not
only physical, but also mobile and flexible instances of authority. The classical
colonial modality of impositions from the center on the periphery through the
direct imposition of a singular power and authority now gives way to an alto-
gether more diffuse appropriation. This promotes a new conceptual landscape
that invites us to consider how the order of power is inscribed, articulated, and
becomes in multidimensional space.

Borders are violently imposed, are signs of power, but they are also criti-
cally and culturally productive. The border is a framing device that gives
shape and sense to what it contains, what it seeks to include and exclude. If
the border ushers in an instance of the exceptional state—each and every one
finds his or her biographical status and citizenship temporally suspended
before being reconfirmed (or challenged)—it reveals, in the very intensity of
its biopolitics, the underlying protocols that define and confine its own do-
mestic population. Borders force us to reconsider the historical, political,
and cultural configurations that gave rise to their necessity. They bring back into the picture what they were previously designed to exclude: the defeated, the subaltern, the other; other histories, other territories of belonging and becoming, push up against this seemingly impassable framing. If legally rigid, borders are historically fluid and socially complex: for some they represent simply stamps on a passport, for others an apparently impossible barrier, yet every day they continue to be crossed, and hence simultaneously challenged and confirmed, in both legal and illegal fashion.

In 2000 the Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar staged a forty-five-minute event on the Mexican-U.S. border at Valle Del Matador (Tijuana–San Diego) titled “The Cloud.” The cloud, composed of hundreds of white balloons, was released to float high up over the fence, impervious to the 3,000 U.S. Border Patrol agents along the sixty-six-mile frontier in San Diego County, as a tribute to the thousands who have lost their lives trying to cross this line in the desert. Music was played both sides of the border, poetry read, and a moment of silence observed. Despite the massive investment in militarized personnel and sophisticated surveillance devices in this war zone, the frontier was evoked, mourned, and temporarily punctured. For the frontier, both to those who seek at all costs to maintain it and to those who seek to overcome and subvert its arbitrary division, has many dimensions. The blind rigidity of its bureaucracy is increasingly accompanied by a fluidity and flexibility in its application.

To leave familiar territory and cross the frontier is somehow to enter a shadow land where familiar rules come undone. Moving among the unknown, confronting one’s fears and exposure, the frontier crossing is not only that characterized in the northern imagination by existential uncertainties and a “touch of evil” south of the border; for the vast majority migrating into the north of the world, border crossings are a zone of potential death and subsequently of guaranteed exploitation. If much study and critical writing on border zones has concentrated on these inhuman conditions, it has rarely sought to examine the premises and privileges of its own world in the cruel light of this structural reality that represents an undeclared war on the poor of the planet. The disciplinary imperative has been precisely that: disciplinary. The desire has been to render the unknown transparent to one’s intellectual and cultural will. To explain has somehow meant to annul a potential disturbance and bring it all home, rationally reduced to domestic reason and subordinated to one’s view of the world. Yet borders, beyond the obvious installation of authority, surveillance, and control, exist only in the act of being crossed. Borders are brought to life, and acquire their performative power, only when they are traversed, transgressed, and trespassed; in other
words, they are not simply the sites of the hegemonic power imposing the reach of its law, but also of other, subaltern, subversive, and subterranean powers constantly pushing up against the fence, and sometimes crossing over.

If so many of today's borders represent postcolonial wounds, *una herida abierta* (Gloria Anzaldúa) bleeds into the accounting of time and place both sides of the cut. There persists proximity, even communality, often denied, negated, and repressed by those who feel their history is the unique narrative, which proposes an unsuspected cartography for traveling into border zones. The sociological, anthropological, and political mapping of such confines invariably fails to chart the full significance of this unauthorized space and associated practices. Beyond political reasoning, there is a poetics of sound and vision, of music, literature, and the visual arts, that proposes modalities of narrating a multiple modernity irreducible to the homogeneous attention of border control. The inscription of these other languages on the metropolitan body of modernity propels us into considering the disquieting annihilation of distance—both physical and metaphysical—between worlds once considered different and apart, but now suspended and sustained in a shared planetary matrix. These are also critical proximities. Such borders do not merely propose casting our attention to the previously abandoned margins of a modernity unilaterally conceived, those distant confines out there in the periphery far from the centers of our concern, but rather, and altogether more radically, invest our very understanding of modernity. Once-separated worlds—the first and the third, the north and the south of the planet, the rich and the poor—now exceed their confines.

Moving in circuits that simultaneously lie below and beyond the national frame—those of the visual arts, of local acts that travel in transnational literary and visual languages or in sound—connections and communities are formed. Modernity is blogged, temporarily caught in a snapshot, faded in and out and pasted together; it is translated and transformed in the transit of local coordinates and conditions. Subsequent versions also travel elsewhere. Despite the unequal and unjust access to the means of cultural reproduction, each and every take leaves a trace, produces a fold, creates an unsuspected intensity, forms a friction, in a modernity that is not only ours to manage and define. The once-background “noise” of the “outside” world here becomes an altogether more insistent sound. It acquires sense and shape in a modernity that branches out in a heterogeneous assemblage. Orchestrated by power, certainly, but those powers are not only those of existing planetary hegemony. The previously silenced, excluded, negated, and ignored also inhabit this space, proposing their sense of place.
Meanwhile, in Tijuana, on the border, in a city of at least 1.5 million souls, such abstract concerns acquire life and directions, and with them deviation and drift. The processes are not prescriptive; they refer to practices and potential. The violence of modern state formation, the rough justice of border settlements, and the multiple currents and eddies of a hybridizing modernity are obviously condensed in the configurations of this frontier city. Of course, but daily textures, the issues and tissues of both politics and poetics, the criss-crossing of global capital, crime and the corruption of power, not only draw Tijuana close to Los Angeles, London, and Tokyo, but transform its presumed “border” condition into an unsuspected critical space that casts its own particular light into the heart of modernity itself.

In this altogether more fluid reality where presumed peripheries and margins propose an urgent centrality, the border itself reveals its unnerving duplicity. Whose border is it? Each side of the confine claims it. While El Norte reinforces its authority on this space with a multimillion-dollar industry in surveillance and policing, it is nevertheless still unable to fully contain it or suppress its disquieting phantoms. Not only do drugs and undocumented labor continue to cross its confines, but both southern traffic and border disturbance continually interrogate the cage that simultaneously seeks to keep the South out and the North in. The frontier not only creates the figure of the foreigner who is excluded, it also constitutes, limits, and defines the very nature of what exists inside the frontier, what lies repressed in the domestic scene. In this ambivalence, all the premises—from patrolling the border to those disciplines that pretend to explain its histories and contemporary conditions—are exposed to unauthorized questioning.

From considerations of Tijuana as a border city we are pushed into thinking the whole world as a multiplicity of border zones, traversed by legislation, enforcement, and bureaucracy, and then complicated by the unaccounted histories and cultures embodied in the migrancy of unauthorized bodies and cultures. If, most obviously, we encounter this situation and its arbitrary violence in the southwestern desert of the United States, along the northern edges of the Sahara and on the waters of the Mediterranean Sea, on both sides of the English Channel, in the ambivalent territories of Palestine and Kurdistan, between Asia and Australia in the Timor Sea, it is too easy to forget that these borders also run through the streets, tongues, arrangements, and divisions of first-world cities. The multiethnic populations of Los Angeles, London, and Paris are also researched, profiled, and policed, for even if these populations are certainly resident in the nation they are frequently considered to be not fully part of the nation. The externally exercised biopolitics of yesterday’s colonial
administration has not so much disappeared as transmuted into the technologically sustained, and hence hypothetically altogether more flexible, management of the modern political body of the occidental metropolis.

At the same time, ongoing attempts to legislate and control space, to maintain the distinction between inside and outside, is constructed on a mobile terrain where categories and definitions continually slip into sites of contestation: space is never empty, it is invariably peopled and folded into multiple and multilateral processes of social becoming. The desire for transparency and rational control—by both government authorities and academic disciplines—is always destined to be thwarted, no matter what are the terrible short-time consequences in terms of lives and suffering.

There exist unregistered tempos and spaces that deviate and befuddle the accountable logic of linear time, of progress and its ideology of accumulative productivity. In the drift across the border of rational management and over the categorical divide, beyond the conceptual limits of prescribed histories, cultures, and identities, there exists a fiesta of multiplicity that challenges the homogeneous accounting of time and space.

What is being entertained here is the undoing and dispersal—not the cancellation—of an earlier configuration of knowledge, leading, in turn, to the unwinding of the legislative authority of the Northern Hemisphere (the West) as the unique Subject of History. This is to propel thinking into uncharted territory. To borrow a metaphor from urban geography, it suggests a vast and indefinite area—like the sprawling urban slums and shantytowns of Tijuana, Rio, Lagos, Cairo, or Istanbul, peopled by a complex, anonymous, marginalized underclass neither recognized as urban nor as rural—which lies between disciplinary definitions and other modalities of knowledge. If the former present themselves in terms of an epistemic configuration that pretends to impose itself universally and hence unilaterally, the latter, as a heterogeneous and unsystematic interrogation of that configuration, sets a limit, proposing an insistent border that provokes a transit, a transformation, an interrogative elsewhere. In this, Tijuana is profoundly global. While caught in the net of a political economy that sprawls across continents and seas, where labor is not national but transnational and always shadowed and disciplined by a reserve army of “illegal” immigrants, the net, as the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo once pointed out, is also full of holes.

Caught in a global calculus, Tijuana also brings to the equation unknown factors. Halting the idea of rhizomatic and intercultural patterns for a moment, we can witness how heterogeneous elements, processes, and flows coalesce in a precise critical instance like Walter Benjamin’s dialectical image
that flares up in a moment of danger: there to register the unanswered questions, the questions that perhaps will never be answered but which continue to haunt our language and understanding. Here it is language itself that provokes a further opening in the net. Torn away from the empirical medium of transparent communication imposed by the Anglophone world, language swells with signification, and border cities, where seemingly different historical blocs and cultural configurations push up against each other, become overloaded paradigms of an excess of sense. Here the explosion of ethnographic detail is decanted into aesthetic inscription.

For it is poetics, as the custodian of the excess of language (literary, visual, sonorial, performative), that most profoundly registers the inscription of time and place. Following the sound, listening to the prose, the poetry, and the poetical, caught in the visual frame, we are pushed into another space, another “Tijuana,” that is irreducible to sociological statistics, historical explanation, and political management. The cultural dimension is not here an adjunct or accessory to the sociohistorical matrix, but is rather a critical apparatus in its own right. In its reassembling practices and procedures, art proposes new conditions for receiving the “social,” the “historical,” and the “political.” The reassembling, as Walter Benjamin pointed out, referring to the task of translation as piecing together the fragments of language, does not arrive at constituting a new totality. The fragments are freed from their previous unity, and are left to find another arrangement.

This is the unsuspected power of language whatever its provenance. It proposes a potentiality: not only a way of being in the world, but also one of becoming. It is precisely on this cusp that art seeds a political inheritance with a poetical interruption, drawing out of the folds of time and memory, other, unsuspected patterns and paths. This is to suggest that we respond and locate ourselves in the arts in terms of a critical configuration that exceeds the prescribed social location as “art,” “aesthetics,” or “entertainment.” A slash across the continuity of common sense is affected. For we are invariably taught to consider the text, the printed page, the performance, particularly of subaltern cultural formations, as the social and cultural mirror of reality (however complicated the reflection), and hence as a relatively stable object of study and attention. Yet language as literature, as a transformative poetics, as sound, is itself a reality that invests us with the imperative to reconsider and review the very terms of aesthetical and ethical sense; that is, to rethink the very conditions of “reality.” This, to propose a Deleuzian figure, is a “line of flight” that permits the escape of postcolonial art and literature from the perpetual cycle of cultural representation, repression, and
resistance. It is to transform the noted Bhabhian concept of a “third space” into a dynamic, unfolding vector in which the very terms of inherited understanding are exposed to a questioning they have neither foreseen nor authorized. At this point, the literary, the poetical, the artistic provide the cardinal points of a new critical compass: one that promotes a diverse navigation of a planetary, but differentiated, modernity.

Here the city, its form, function, and future, is split open, exposed to unsuspected winds. Fragmented, cut up, translated, sampled, and remixed, the solidity of the city as social and historical edifice cracks under the heterogeneous requests of its own multiplying archive. Domestic elements migrate into new configurations of sense, become strangers to themselves. They propose the undisciplined extension of practices and analyses that breach the boundaries of the existing authorization of knowledge, evacuating local, national, and disciplinary grounds. This suggests that in order to explain the “logic” of contemporary Tijuana in a cross-disciplinary and intercultural manner, that is, to respond to its mobile textures, grammar, and unfolding languages, we need to veer away from habitual referents toward a more experimental series of ethnographies that emerge in the interstices of new cultural configurations. In order to look at the city, rather than merely see it, there are many roads that can be taken. Some are subject to dense cultural traffic; others propose isolated, but perhaps exemplary, encounters. We are often forced to slow down, get out and observe close up, other times to catch distant profiles in the mirror. The trip is always incomplete and inconclusive: it is a critical journey. What, in the performative instances of multiple metropolitan languages, is forcibly brought home is that the old imperial distances of center and periphery have evaporated. There may well be other, altogether more flexible, discriminatory practices and economies that have replaced that stern logic, but there is now also a significant proximity and communal- ity sustained in an urban global grammar that seeds both differences and interdependence. In this sense, a border city like Tijuana, just like the Pakistani city of Peshawar on the North-West Frontier (its three million population swelled with Pashtun Afghan refugees), is saturated with its own variations of the signs and sounds of planetary modernity, and brimming with the violent economies of illegal migration and frontier life. Such cities suggestively replace Walter Benjamin’s Paris to propose themselves as the new paradigmatic “capitals” of the twentieth-first century.

The violence of the line, the brutality of borders, and the fetishization of frontiers is obviously a deeply reductive framing of social and historical space. An ecodynamics would of course situate such limits and teach us
something different. An eagle hovering in the hot air currents over the Iranian desert near the Pakistan border, like its cousin, along with the coyote, the whale, and the butterfly in northern Mexico and the southwestern United States are all humanistically appropriated but ultimately unredeemed by their diverse linguistic and national denominations. A similar fluidity lies in the unlicensed journeys of the artwork. It is this precise edge, where poetics suggests another politics, which provokes an often-unsuspected critical language. Here artistic practices are not simply modalities of historical witnessing and testimony, but rather, in proposing configurations of time and space, establish the places of another critical cartography. The realities of Tijuana come to be mapped, surveyed, visited, and lived differently, diversely, anew. An inheritance is reworked, an archive remixed, a city rendered mobile by maps it had not previously recognized nor certified. In this sense, Tijuana proposes a model of the unsettled becoming of a modernity that invests not only its own particular body and borders but also the multiple reach of the planetary languages in which it is suspended and sustained.

In this there lies the postcolonial return of the repressed as every metropolis becomes a potential migrant zone, crossed and cut up by a multiple series of borders. The previously excluded now reemerges within to reconfigure the economical, social, and cultural profile of the modern city. There is, as Michel de Certeau observed some time ago, no “outside.” Modernity itself is not a quality to be controlled, defended, and defined, but rather an ongoing urban grammar that worlds the world, collaging differences and communalities. Here in the complex prism of individual places, we encounter a modernity that no longer merely mirrors a single reasoning, but rather proposes variants in which local syntax exists and persists as a critical challenge and an ongoing interrogation. In the coeval, but unequal and unjust, mix of planetary modernity, it now becomes impossible to chart a simple hierarchy of development and “progress.” Here the classical distinction between tradition and modernity dissolves into another space; an assumed linearity breaks up in an altogether more fluid series of dynamics in which tradition and locality, as sites of translation and transformation, live on and engage with the surrounding world from within modernity itself: the faith healer with the cell phone. This suggests that it is crucial to unbind both critical and poetical narratives from linear time. Development in the non-European world is also always, as it has been for five hundred years, about planetary locations and their possibilities. The so-called south of the world is always already within modernity.

Such a change in perspective retrieves subjects and societies from the seemingly impossible race of modernity: not yet there, almost there, hopelessly
behind. It emerges in the wake of the theoretical leap proposed by the Sardinian intellectual Antonio Gramsci, and more recently reproposed by the Palestinian critic Edward Said. For both thinkers, the political, cultural, and historical struggle lies not between modernity and tradition, but rather between hegemony and the subaltern. From this 180-degree shift in cultural coordinates there emerges a radical revaluation of the dynamic and always inconclusive sense of culture. Recognizing in resistance, deviance, and drift the conditions of critique, it becomes possible to register the powers that seek both to configure and to contest the “common sense” of hegemony. On the cusp of this scenario, Tijuana lies both at the “third-world” end of Latin America and at the beginning of the “American Dream.” In terms of its positionality and as a contemporary metropolitan proposition, contemporary Tijuana continues to rehearse Frantz Fanon’s provocative reassembling of worldly relationships when in The Wretched of the Earth he declared that the first world was literally the creation of the third world. The dream, power, wealth, freedom, and hegemony are structurally sustained by what they exclude, negate, and repress. We now clearly find ourselves moving in dimensions that exceed contemporary cosmopolitanism, tapping complex asymmetries of power that break the boundaries of comfortable definitions, abstract securities, and the reassuring logic of transparent representation.

In the montage of the metropolis yet to come, sounds and signs betray simple mapping. They propose not so much “authentic” views of the “real” Tijuana as the altogether more disquieting deflection of inherited languages and definitions as they come to be folded into the unsuspected materialities of life. A further take, another combination, an unplanned idiom, wrenches modernity out of its abstract state (and hegemonic universalism) and decants its possibilities into the idiolectical realization of a particular configuration of place. What comes from elsewhere, from south of the border, potentially disrupts and ultimately reworks a modernity that if now worldly no longer depends only on a privileged part of the planet for its legitimacy. Over the border, across the line, in the “unconscious,” lies the challenge of the opaque, the unseen, and the unrecognized: not the irrational but further “reasons” that are irreducible to a single, however powerful, rationality.

This is the crack in the wall, the hole in the fence, which both betrays and exposes the arrogant pretensions of believing that your (or rather my) culture and history has the unique right to legislate the world. If all of this continues to occur “under Western eyes” (Joseph Conrad), it is certainly no longer only authorized by the West. If the terms are clearly of European provenance (literature, art, aesthetics, nation), they are at the same time subjected to the trans-
formative practices of “detrerritorialization” and “reterritorialization.” In their local accents and flexible cadences the transit and translation of such terms expose a planetary promise and potential that denies their points of “origin.” Further, it leads to the uncomfortable realization that “my” culture and history is not only mine. Despite the barriers, the controls, the surveillance, and the disciplinary protocols, my space has been invaded, contaminated, creolized, translated, and transformed into a planetary syntax that provides a home for a thousand dialects, a million idioms. This leads to emerging languages formed in the inconclusive transit of time, on the threshold of place, in the mobility induced by a worldly becoming.

At this point, in Tijuana, on the border, neither the reconfiguration of existing critical dispositions nor the reconfirmation of the logics of a planetary political economy provides sufficient explanation. There is now the necessity of a critical and cultural disengagement from the existing lexicon of sense. The latter, as hegemonic reality, as institutional power and disciplinary language, is not, however, simply canceled; rather, it comes to be exposed to interrogations it has never authorized. That particular occidental inheritance, and the universalist pretensions of its archive, now spills out into a critical field that is also inhabited by others. Those who were once the “objects” of an anthropological, sociological, literary, historical, and aesthetic gaze are now “subjects” who refuse to inhabit those categories passively. Here, crossing the border, cutting the conceptual fence and exiting from the disciplinary frame, the work in this volume may begin to teach us how to begin to live, to work, to think and become in a world that does not simply mirror our passage. It is precisely here, contrasting the inventive fluidity of lived responses to the abstract rigidity of occidental classification that an intercultural critique is rendered possible. Historical, cultural, and political sense is not a category but, evoking a lineage that runs from Ibn Khaldûn through Giambattista Vico to Marx and Gramsci, a shifting constellation of practices. These, as they are here enacted in the unfolding complexities of contemporary Tijuana, force the world into an opening that cannot be reduced to a single version pretending universal validity.
The Factory of Dreams

Tijuana is an industrial park on the outskirts of Minneapolis. Tijuana is a colony of Tokyo. Tijuana is a Taiwanese sweatshop. — RICHARD RODRIGUEZ, Days of Obligation

My city is not only a street full of stupid gringos living an endless summer and two-colored Indians who sell paper flowers, of striped donkeys and suitcases full of cheap jewelry, of broken sad eyes with a Sony videocamera, of terraces full of motherfuckers who take poppers and kiss the ground looking for a Mexican señorita. . . . My city is a cage of illusions full of mirrors, wise poets and wannabe pop stars. Poverty is in the suburbs and God is in every church, in the digital spots of the TV. — RAFA SAAVEDRA, Buten Smileys

There are many Tijuanas. Each one of them is half myth, half temporarily out of service. — HERIBERTO YÉPEZ, A.B.U.R.T.O.

There were dancers in matching red-and-yellow mechanic suits balancing on rusting steel railings. There were DJs tweaking mixing boards, blasting cavernous dub from hollowed-out Volkswagen vans. Abandoned auto parts became makeshift sculptures. Spray-paint stencils of wrenches and demolished cars covered four stories of towering cement walls. There were television monitors to watch. There were T-shirts to buy.

This was Tijuana in the fall of 2002, at the Nuevo Ferrari yonke, or junkyard, on boulevard Díaz Ordaz, where a local artist collective inspired by junkyard aesthetics of rescue and recycling, YONKEart, had organized the Yonke Life party—a multimedia art happening that fell somewhere between a rave and a gallery installation featuring some of the turn-of-the-twenty-first-century Tijuana art and music scene’s more familiar names, the street artist Acamonchi and house music specialist Tolo among them. Up on the junkyard roof, beneath the burned-out Ferrari sign and in front of stacks of crushed car frames, an audience of bundled-up young tijuanenses sat in upholstered car seats salvaged from Ford Rangers and watched a locally made indie film that ended with a kid telling his father he wants to be
a rapper, not a mariachi singer. Off in the distance, Tijuana was a swelling ocean of flickering hillside lights, spilling out in bejeweled waves that seemed to go on forever.

In many ways, YONKEart was a kind of sequel to a similar event held a year earlier, only then the site was not a still-active junkyard, but a no-longer-active jai alai stadium in the heart of the city’s main tourist artery, Avenida Revolución. Billed as Maquiladora de Sueños, or Factory of Dreams, it was a party/art show wrapped around a high concept: instead of a maquiladora factory that assembled foreign parts into products for export and foreign consumption, this factory would assemble art and culture for local consumption. The notion was literalized in an installation of grainy photo portraits of women workers from Tijuana’s thousands of maquiladora factories accompanied by audio recordings of their self-testimonies of everyday factory life, in a collection of found objects culled from factory floors, and in a live “dream-sweatshop” performance where young women dressed as maquiladora workers assembled packets of wishes and dreams out of spare wires, memory chips, power boards, and PC parts. They were joined by a range of projects that blurred art and life: small-scale architecture models of Tijuana colonias; border checkpoint tourist kitsch made of old computer parts; custom border-transit pants designed by the local art and design company Torolab to accommodate visas, permits, and passports; and a line of “cyber-norteño” clothing that featured high-tech ponchos, Day-Glo mesh serapes, and parachute dresses with vaquero stitching. The artist Jaime Ruiz Otis scavenged maquiladora dumpsters for polyethylene bags and rubber gloves, filled them with foam, and then hung the new creations from the ceiling of the jai alai so they swung above the dance floor like deindustrial pendulums—humble chandeliers of high-finance manufacturing. For Ruiz, the suspended bags were meant to be reminders of labor, hours of brutal, tedious assembly-line work looming over the pleasures of a party.

The event was the brainchild of Pedro Beas, a member of the Nortec Collective, then a six-member group of electronic musicians, producers, and DJs who were rising to local and international fame for their clever merger of electronic dance music with the accordions, tambora, and tuba-laced brass of Mexican norteño and banda sinaloense. After forming in 1999, Nortec’s musical and cultural mash had rapidly made them the poster boys for both millennial Tijuana and the city’s millennial generation, the software-generated and digitally compressed soundtrack—where traditional and acoustic regional Mexican styles bled into newly minted global club cultures—to a sprawling and combusting border city that was then, as it is now, facing massive challenges in the age of free trade and economic globalization.¹
Maquiladora de Sueños and Yonke Life were both products of global Tijuana and vibrant, grassroots expressions of it, and they both aspired to translate (and grapple with) the impact of asymmetrical global economics, uneven international information networks, and ravenous neoliberal trade and fiscal policy into locally conceived cultural events and performances. The mergers they represent—between culture and economics, art and politics, the analog and the digital, the infinitely virtual and finitely material, the promise of the global and the pain of the global—are the mergers that helped inspire the impetus for this book. Both events engaged Tijuana as a city of both assemblage and deassemblage, a city of internationally bankrolled industrial parks and three-story, binational chop shops where stripped luxury scrap parts are given new life in the automotive Frankensteins (German-Italian mechanical mutts) that swerve across Tijuana’s rotary circles.

Tijuana Dreaming is our attempt to explore the many dimensions of this globally impacted Tijuana, from the mid-sixties up through the futurist digital urbanisms that the Tijuana writer and blogger Rafa Saavedra has called TJ2020.html (we include a “mixtape” of some of Saavedra’s self-chosen “greatest hits” here). While scholarship and press on Tijuana has tended to favor either highly utopian (“City of Postmodern Tomorrow,” “Artistic Mecca”) or highly dystopian (“Global Junkyard,” “Slum of Empire”) views, we have been inspired by cultural events like Maquiladora de Sueños and Yonke Life in that they live somewhere in the middle and reveal a city that is actively shaping its identity on the rocky ground between culture as global critique and culture as global capital, and between globalization’s perils and its tempting, taunting promises.

Tijuana, Reassembled

In recent years, Tijuana has been the subject of numerous battles over definition. “This is Tijuana,” one anthology declared, while another insisted that, no, “Here is Tijuana.” As Humberto Félix Berumen, a leading Tijuana scholar, shows in his essay that we include here, Tijuana is a city of multiple discourses and archetypes that only relatively recently emerged as a “narratable city,” a city of legible narratives and comprehensible ideas. Trendy and appealing for some, horrific and frightening for others, Tijuana has invariably been described, in both print and new media, as “hybrid,” “not Mexico,” “the End of Latin America and the beginning of the American Dream,” “the happiest place on earth,” “a laboratory of postmodernity,” “a third space,” “a porous border,” “a Walled City,” “a drug capital” on the U.S. travel advisory list.
Historically often a city of passage and increasingly a city of immigrant destination, narco networking, and Homeland Security intensity in post-9/11 geopolitics, contemporary Tijuana is a city of superlatives: Tijuana the most-crossed space in the world, Tijuana the ugliest city in the world, Tijuana the most violent, Tijuana the most creative, Tijuana the most dangerous. These are all, as Heriberto Yépez explains in his contribution here, “Tijuanologies,” academic theories, cultural myths, and pop culture hyperboles that have come to be more visible than any of the city’s own social realities.

Tijuana lives on multiple maps. Situated at the edge of the Mexican post-revolutionary nationalist imaginary, Tijuana is a waiting room for undocumented migrants from Latin America and continental Mexico and a passageway (for anything) to the other side. Situated at the edge of the U.S. national imaginary, Tijuana has historically been a pleasure playground for the U.S. tourist in search of cheap, nearby thrills and a financial playground for the global CEO looking to maximize Pacific Rim profits with cheap nonunion labor. Or as Santiago Vaquera-Vásquez puts it in his essay here, “Tijuana can be read as an outpost in the middle world between the first and the third.” As such, it has a vexed relation to any one particular national formation and harbors a singular confluence of cultural differences that nonetheless elude, or even reject, contemporary notions of cosmopolitanism. Tijuana has emerged as a unique site for contemplating the drastic and devastating asymmetries and inequities—the “negative globalization” that is increasingly synonymous with globalization itself—that characterize the global experience. “Today’s globalization is radically different from its predecessors on one essential point,” Daniel Cohen writes. “It is difficult to be an actor but easy to be a spectator. . . . The new global economy creates an unprecedented rupture between the expectations to which it gives birth and the reality it brings about.”

This collection approaches Tijuana from its coordinates on the map of this new global economy where liquid flows are put into action only through the proliferation of immobile partitions, control mechanisms, and security environments (the Tijuana novelist and writer Luis Humberto Crosthwaite gives us border crossing as border immobility, border flows as border waiting, in his short story included here). These essays are all aware of Tijuana’s place along what Thomas P. M. Barnett, a former secretary of defense strategist, has dubbed “the political equator,” the dividing line between the world’s “functioning core” and its “non-integrating gap” that is guaranteeing that globalization is not actually a global phenomenon. The geographer Harm de Blij similarly contends that the global map is divided between a global core and a global periphery, and what keeps the two sectors apart is “the Western Wall
around the global core,” a series of borders that keep the inequities and asymmetries of globalization in place.4 Of the eleven control sites he and other economic geographers have identified (southern Spain—northern Africa, North Korea—South Korea, and Israel—West Bank, among them), the U.S.-Mexico border at its Pacific edge—the home turf of Tijuana—is number one on the list.

*Tijuana Dreaming* investigates Tijuana’s place on this global map of flows and partitions, actors and spectators, winners and losers, by approaching the city’s history according to two distinct, though intertwined periods. First, the *age of tourism* (1889–1965), which begins with the city’s founding as a small, family-owned cattle *ranchería* in 1889 and extends through its Prohibition-era development into a tourist outpost and “city of sin” vice magnet for U.S. pleasure seekers heavily financed by Alta California entertainment entrepreneurs, media tycoons, and railroad barons. Though Tijuana’s tourist heyday began to dwindle in the late 1960s, in some sense the city remains forever locked in the sombreros and curio shops of tourist postcards, in a black-and-white 1920s-tinted image of itself as a Las Vegas–Old Mexico hybrid of tequila hangovers, casino smoke, and cheap, dirty sex where the mythic Donkey Show still has some gravitational pull. In her essay for this collection, Jennifer Insley-Pruitt shows how this history of myth and black legend has been transformed by some of Tijuana’s leading contemporary literary figures, and Berumen, Vaquera-Vásquez, and the Mexico City writer Guillermo Fadanelli all return to Tijuana’s tourist haunts and nightclub utopias in order to make sense of the city in the present tense.

But the essays in this volume are born mostly from this second historical period, the *age of globalization* (1965–present), which begins in earnest with the transformation of Tijuana into a city of export-oriented assembly with the passage of the Border Industrialization Program (*BIP*) in 1965, a proposed Mexican remedy to the end of the U.S. Bracero Program that rescinded the labor invitations that had brought so many Mexicans north beginning in the 1940s. The *BIP*, aimed at generating employment and economic development along the border, was a monumental piece of legislation that would radically alter Tijuana’s social and economic landscape by removing international tariff barriers, opening Tijuana (as well as other border cities) up to the arrival of foreign maquiladora assembly plants, and setting the stage for the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement nearly thirty years later.5 Indeed, as the sociologist Leslie Sklair has argued, the *BIP* did far more than simply create new border jobs. It aimed to redefine the border region into a “development zone” and “dynamic growth pole” whose very essence and identity were rooted in its value as an economic resource for northern Mexico’s entrance
into the global economy. Early Tijuana maquiladora assembly plants like Litton Industries and Fairchild, for example, shipped their memory boards and electrical transformers from Baja California to Alta California and were instrumental in the growth of Silicon Valley’s multibillion-dollar global tech industry.

The 1965 BIP legislation—which had early roots in 1930s drives to cast Baja California as a “free perimeter” or “free zone” for industrial imports—was preceded four years earlier by the Programa Nacional Fronterizo, or PRONAF, Mexico’s first internally driven attempt to pump money and investment into the consumer and industrial markets of its northern border, urging Mexican nationals to “buy Mexican” and reframing the border as a consumer zone, “Mexico’s show window.” PRONAF and the BIP both paved the way for the free trade policies and economic border deregulation of NAFTA in the 1990s, and taken together all three powerfully shaped Tijuana’s entrance into the global economy. And all three powerfully impacted the city’s own identity as an emergent hub of globalized urbanism characterized by chronic population explosions, fragile urban infrastructures and emergency architectures, booming industrial parks and fading tourist industries, and a massive community of working poor that grows alongside both an ascendant middle class and an ascendant narco culture of quick wealth, ephemeral bling, urban terror, and fragile human life.

It is this Tijuana that emerges in Josh Kun’s contribution here, a beleaguered and militarized city marred by sadness and beset by kidnappings and drug violence, where so much can be lost in the desperate hunt for power and wealth. If, as the pioneering Tijuana journalist Jesús Blancornelas once wrote, “corruption is the mother of drug trafficking,” then uneven economic globalization is at least one mother of that corruption. The post-1965 economic transformation of Tijuana helped turn the city into fertile soil for the economic desperation and social instability that drug cartels thrive on, and with the arrival of the Arellano-Felix cartel in the early 1990s, Tijuana’s pivotal position as a drug route between the United States and South America was secured. While drug violence had been a part of Tijuana’s urban profile since the early nineties, it was in the following decade that the violence spilled out beyond the world of narco, politicians, and millionaires. When Tijuana’s murder rate reached its all-time high in 2008, the city seemed as if it were under siege. Innocent people were dying, kindergartners were caught in shoot-outs, military tanks hovered over thoroughfares, and the killings got more and more grisly. The enobijados, or bodies wrapped in blankets, of the nineties had become the three hundred bodies dissolved in acid by El Po-
zolero in 2009. The wealthy fled north to San Diego, the middle classes bulletproofed their windows, and the city’s working poor, including so many thousands of maquiladora workers who still left their colonias every morning at dawn for the assembly plants, were more vulnerable than ever before.

If the capital of tourist Tijuana is the infamous downtown main drag of Avenida Revolución—the fabled multiblock strip of clubs, bars, curio shops, and pharmacies that is usually the first, and often only, stop on the itinerary of the Tijuana tourist—then the capital of this vulnerable global Tijuana is the zone known as the 5 y 10. Named for a former five-and-dime store, the 5 y 10 cluster of shops, malls, markets, and pedestrian bridges lies at the heart of the eastern La Mesa district and is the chief commercial center and transportation hub for Tijuana’s working classes. Over the river from the city’s central bus terminal and a short distance from both the La Mesa prison and some of the city’s maquiladoras and maquiladora housing colonias, it’s an overcrowded and exhaust-choked crossroads that’s the bustling epicenter of global Tijuana’s everyday hustle. While many of these essays are shadowed by Tijuana’s tourist past and informed by its tourist myths, we see them all in dialogue in some way with the city that is reborn daily at the 5 y 10. It’s here where investments in border industry cross paths with divestments in border ecology, health, and economic justice; it’s here where low-wage workers employed by global corporations do their daily consuming before returning to homes without sewage and clean water (an estimated 40 percent of the city lacks proper sewage and water). It’s precisely this world that is documented in Maquilapolis, the 2006 film by Vicky Funari and Sergio de la Torre about this “city of factories,” which figures centrally in Tarek Elhaik’s piece for this collection.

Beginning in 1965, Tijuana became one of many international cities that felt the brunt of widespread deindustrialization campaigns and drives toward outsourced manufacturing. David Harvey has argued that it was in the post-1965 period that “the production of geographical difference” begins to become a hallmark of globalization. By focusing on Tijuana in this historical period, this collection examines the impact of capitalism’s “uneven geographical development” on one city, a further reminder that the most intense dramas of globalization continue to occur not on global stages, but on local and regional ones. Tijuana is an ideal site to follow through on Saskia Sassen’s important urgings that globalization does not minimize the role of nations and cities, but that globalization actually exists through nations and cities which function as “enablers” and “enactors” of the global. The essays in this collection look nothing like a world made flat, its national differences evened out by globalization’s helping hand, but instead show us—whether in
Tito Alegría’s debunking of cultural integration myths or Teddy Cruz’s attention to ecological and infrastructural disjunctures or even Luis Humberto Crosthwaite’s meditation on the border-crossing line itself—how the economic changes that swept through Tijuana in the late 1960s still require national differences to maintain the very exploitations and inequalities that successful economic globalization requires.

They also remind us of the connections that Alejandro Lugo has recently insisted upon in his own study of the impact of assemblage economies on border lives: the globalization of border cities is not born of a historical vacuum but is “a socio-historical product of the politics of conquest of two global empires—the Spanish empire (1521–1810) and the American empire (1848–present).” Tijuana is a global city, then, not only because it has been made to play a contemporary role in free trade’s reorganization of North America and neoliberalism’s reimagining of social life, sovereignty, and subjectivity, but because it inherits two imperial lineages, both of which set the stage for the domination and administration of the Mexican working classes that the current era of assembly and manufacturing still depends upon. For Sassen, a global city is characterized by two central traits: it is a site “of the overvalorization of corporate capital and the further devalorization of disadvantaged economic actors” on the one hand, and on the other, it is a “strategic site for disempowered actors because it enables them to gain presence, to emerge as subjects, even when they do not gain direct power.” The essays gathered here reflect on both of these traits as they’ve emerged in Tijuana, where since 1965 intense corporate investment and economic development have been coupled with both local struggles for economic parity (through both formal and informal, legal and illegal, industries) and struggles for social and cultural visibility.

Yet one area where some of the more foundational scholarly accounts of global cities—or “world cities” and “international cities”—have shed less light is culture. The sociologist Kathryn Kopinak, whose overview of Tijuana’s relationship to economic globalization is included here, has written at length on what she calls “the social costs of industrial growth” in the Tijuana region, but the essays gathered here also force us to consider the cultural costs and the cultural results of industrial growth, how Tijuana’s “urban imaginaries” are expressed and articulated through cultural performance and cultural production. The pieces we’ve included from Ejival, Jesse Lerner, René Peralta, and Tarek Elhaik explore these “urban imaginaries” by looking at Tijuana’s musical countercultures, its architectural ruins and ghosts, and its contemporary cinematic archives. Even in his primarily historical and economic 1993 study of
maquiladoras, Sklair made it clear that the border’s economic restructuring has distinctive cultural impacts. “The concrete manifestations of the globalization of capital are apparent on the export oriented assembly zones,” he wrote. “But their effects are being felt more widely in politics and culture.” Indeed, as Margath Walker has shown, culture has played a central role not only in the imaginaries of young grassroots artists, musicians, writers, designers, and other creatives hoping to make sense of Tijuana, but in the policies and planning of the city of Tijuana itself where, to borrow George Yúdice’s phrase, culture becomes expedient, an economic resource of global visibility and global policy. One of Yúdice’s key case studies in this area is inSITE, the internationally recognized art triennial that since 1992 has been staging large-scale art installations and performances that focus on the San Diego–Tijuana region. While Yúdice applauds inSITE’s role in fostering artistic growth in the border region and putting Tijuana on a global map of artistic interest, he also sees it as a kind of artistic corollary of NAFTA’s free-trade economic policies, only here it’s culture that is assembled with foreign money by local workers, it’s culture that acts as capital, and it’s culture that is imbued with economic value for global investors and consumers. He goes so far as to dub inSITE “an artistic maquiladora whose executives (the directors of the art event) contract with managers (the curators) to map out the agenda for flexible workers-for-hire (artists) who in turn produce or extract (cultural) capital by processing a range of materials.” The extent to which Tijuana’s city officials themselves seem to be embracing a free-trade approach to cultural capital and investment can be seen in the 2005–2007 city municipal plan, which contained over twenty references to fostering cultural development in Tijuana. For Walker, this is an attempt to “embed Tijuana deeply and successfully in the global economy by situating its culture for economic gain.” Or in the words of Tijuana’s municipal planners: “Our border position has converted our city into an open space of stimulating innovation and tolerance whose economic vitality and cultural creativity has projected to the international scale.” A similar language and developmental logic was at the core of 2010’s Tijuana Innovadora, a privately funded $5 million two-week conference and image makeover held at CECUT, the city’s leading cultural institution, designed to showcase Tijuana as a center of innovations in technology, science, and culture. Aimed at hundreds of elite global attendees (Al Gore and a cofounder of Wikipedia among them), the event, in the words of the conference’s official video promo, was designed to showcase Tijuana as the capital of “the intelligent frontier” and in language that echoed PRONAF and BIP in the sixties, thereby “generate national investment that will expand the region’s economy.”
“It’s Time for Tijuana”: Global Myths, Global Realities

With over two million people, Tijuana is the second largest city on North America’s Pacific Coast (smaller than Los Angeles, bigger than Seattle and San Francisco). When paired with San Diego to the north, the two cities are responsible for an estimated $6 billion a year in exports and an estimated $8 billion in cross-border trade. The Web site for the nonprofit Tijuana Economic Development Corporation—available in English, Japanese, and Chinese—announces to potential corporate clients that “It’s time for Tijuana,” advertising the city’s rich, seemingly endless resources of “human capital” and promoting its prime Pacific Rim import-export real estate—“globally strategic, yet very near-shore.” As the site puts it, “Having your business in Tijuana not only means you’ll be in a great city next to US markets—it also means you get access to Mexico’s globally-oriented menu of free trade agreements.”

Since the launch of the BIP in 1965, the lure of this regional wealth and the strength of this regional industry has made Tijuana a destination not only for companies looking for tariff-free trade corridors, but for all that “human capital,” those millions of migrants from the south looking to find work on the factory floors of the city’s thousands of maquiladoras (which, it’s estimated, on average employ a million workers at a time). As Berumen reminds us in his essay, others, of course, begin by simply seeing Tijuana as a ciudad de paso, a city there to be crossed and passed by on the way into the United States, a necessary gateway to the world that beckons on the other side of the rusting border wall. While many make it across, more do not, and for them, the maquiladoras are always waiting. The hillsides with views of San Diego and the shantytowns out beyond the official Tijuana city grid are waiting too, and before long migrants become residents, the ciudad de paso becomes a hometown where families are raised, where generations pass.

These processes are at the core of Lawrence Herzog’s many writings on globalization’s impact on the social and ecological infrastructures of Tijuana. For Herzog, Tijuana is an “an ideal laboratory for understanding how globalization is shaping a new kind of urbanism,” this city that sits at the most-crossed land border in the world and cradles the U.S.-Mexico border’s largest port of entry. Yet while the essays in this collection have much in common with Herzog’s portrait of “global Tijuana”—which he outlines according to a taxonomy of various ecologies of trade, consumerism, and community—they stop short of celebrating it as a completed global project, an imaginary border utopia free of disjunctions and economic injustices, where global factories and free-trade policies simply generate new kinds of
freely participating border consumers who become “global citizens” of a new
cross-border global order.

Instead, we see Tijuana as a global city precisely because of the uneven, pre-
carious, and often destructive nature of globalization itself, which might pro-
duce new markets and new consumers as neoliberal victories, but also produce
a border citizenship that is unstable and fragile and a combustive urban in-
frasctructure defined by informal, or “shadow,” economies (including drug and
human trafficking) as much as by the formal flows of global industry. Instead
of a city of “global citizens” participating equally in globalization, tijuanenses
are more frequently part of what Josiah Heyman has called the border’s “con-
sumer proletariat,” people alienated from both the means of production and
the means of consumption. As Harvey has reminded us, globalization indeed
moves across national spaces, but does so unevenly; some sites and spaces are
more resource rich for globalization’s abundances, others more resource rich
for globalization’s scarcities. Tijuana falls into the latter category; part of
what makes it global is its scarcity in the service of affluence.

It is, after all, a city born from not just any geopolitical border, but from the
only one in the world that divides one of the world’s poorest nations from the
world’s richest, which, as Alexis McCrossen has shown, makes it highly attrac-
tive to markets, which are by definition attracted to the kind of “accumulation
of asymmetries in such close proximity” that has become a primary character-
istic of Tijuana’s urban profile. Or as Andreas Huyssen has written of cities in
the age of globalization, “Rather than producing connectivities and flows
equally between all regions of the planet, globalization functions in horizontal
clusters through and among which global, local, and regional dimensions are
ricocheting with varying intensities and breadth.” Tijuana is a ricochet city, a
cluster of connectivities and flows that can be as smooth as they are rough.
Things cross and things are detained. There’s traffic and there’s waiting. Flows
become inspections. Tijuana constantly reminds: the global is also gridlock.

In much recent U.S. scholarship on Tijuana, that gridlock, while always
present, is frequently overshadowed by theories of transnational traffic, cross-
border networks, and transnational urban planning. A 2000 study by a former
city architect of San Diego, Michael Stepner, and a San Diego city planner, Paul
Fiske, for example, included Tijuana–San Diego in the world’s most important
“global city regions,” with Tijuana as one half of a rich binational pairing that
ought to attract investors and urban planners alike (it was an idea previously
explored in 1974 by Kevin Lynch and Donald Appleyard, who had tempered
their binational visions by wondering if the region was a “temporary para-
dise”). Three years earlier, Herzog had already begun developing this idea
when he wrote of the Tijuana–San Diego region as a “transfrontier metropolis” that was a “prototype of global urban space.” Like Stepner and Fiske, Herzog focused on the shared traffic: combined population numbers, binational commuters, binational consumers, cross-border tourists, global factories, cross-border bedroom communities, shared infrastructures, shared fates of urban design. “The age of land warfare is past,” he wrote. “Global markets and free trade are the new dominant realities, and property at the edges of nations is attracting investors, businesses, and governments. Industrial parks, highways, rail systems, and airports that once bypassed international frontiers are relocating there.”

We worry about just how close a “transfrontier metropolis” is to the “Tijuana–San Diego megaregion” promoted by the maquiladora industry, which uses Tijuana’s human capital and tariff-free industrial parks as incentive for future global investment that, contrary to any vision of cross-border parity, will only increase the economic divide between San Diego and Baja California. We have included the work of San Diego–based architect and planner Teddy Cruz in the collection precisely to address these contradictions and these innovations in regional planning as he represents one of the leading contemporary voices in reimagining the infrastructures and public spaces of the cross-border landscape.

The increasingly popular view of the border megacity, where national edges function more as market openings and less as state partitions, reappeared in the influential 2003 collection *Postborder City*, from Michael Dear and Gustavo LeClerc. The volume shed much-needed light on the history of Baja California and on Tijuana’s central role in the inter-California region, but did so by anchoring Tijuana in a transnational geography the authors named “Bajalta California,” a Southern California–northern Mexico zone of trade, culture, and community where the geopolitical border takes a backseat to the idea of a “postborder” where flows of ideas, culture, and finance shape a porous Bajalta border region. While the essays in *Tijuana Dreaming* certainly participate in and contribute to a transnational body of ideas and culture, and while they certainly understand Tijuana’s key coordinates on the Southern California–northern Mexico map, their approach to the city begins on the southern side of a border partition that keeps San Diego’s gross domestic product roughly eleven times that of Tijuana. Viewed from Los Angeles or San Diego, the Tijuana–San Ysidro border may be a zone of free trade and free-flowing economic traffic with edges ripe for investment and planning, but viewed from Tijuana it is first and foremost a barrier and partition between core and periphery, a surveilled zone of Homeland Security policing and economic unevenness, a key example of what Ruth Wilson Gilmore
means by a “fatal power-difference coupling.” Like the prisons Gilmore writes about, the national edges of the new global economy are also mechanisms and icons of domestic militarism, “geographical solutions to social and economic crises, politically organized by a racial state that is itself in crisis.” Especially since the vicious 1994 legislative tag team of NAFTA (opening the border to free movement of goods and parts) and Operation Gatekeeper (closing the border to the free movement of people), Tijuana has been a key site for witnessing what Heyman has described as the border’s “mobilities-enclosures continuum”—where some are allowed to move (“kinetic elites”), while others remain detained. The border becomes a risk-management hub, a filter for “safe” travelers and against “risky” travelers that produces “differential mobility effects.”

Alejandro Lugo has gone one step further and argued against the alleged common sense of borders as places of crossing, insisting instead that borders are primarily places of inspection characterized by the “pervasive pattern of cultural surveillance.” To speak only of the crossings themselves masks the inspections that take place before and after crossing (if crossing is even permitted). For Lugo, then, national borders are far from being the romanticized zones of flux, hybridity, and postmodern deterritoriality that became the familiar subject of so much cultural theory in the 1990s; rather, borders can be redefined as “ethnographic objects that are mainly characterized by supervision and scrutiny.”

As you might expect, theories of Tijuana’s role in a cross-border global megacity have had less currency in Tijuana itself, where scholars and critics are typically more focused on local asymmetry, not inter-California regional prosperity, and have tended to approach globalization not in terms of transnational flows and transnational geographies but in terms of how shifts in global economics have impacted highly localized struggles around culture and politics and local struggles around social equality and civic health. Leading the way has been the Tijuana scholar Tito Alegria (we include a sample of his recent work here), whose 2009 study Metrópolis transfronteriza offers a passionate and thorough refutation of the “transfrontier metropolis” and “megacity” ideas. He argues that Herzog, Dear, and Leclerc confuse interaction with integration. “The flows [between Tijuana and San Diego] are the means of a relationship,” he writes. “But they are not sufficient for an integration.”

There is no doubt that Tijuana is the product of more than a century’s worth of cross-border influence (indeed, one cannot imagine the birth of modern Tijuana itself without the Prohibition-era investments of U.S. capital) but Alegria contends that there has been no integration of Tijuana into
the north-of-the-border economy that fuels cities like Los Angeles and San Diego. Alegría names three “brakes” that slow transfrontier integration: the increase of impediments to south-to-north migrations, the increasing disparities between U.S. and Mexican salaries and prices, and the increasing difficulty for tijuanenses to cross the border north into San Diego County with everyday frequency (he estimates that less than half of the city can do so legally). As a result, where others see U.S.-Mexico transnationalism, Alegría sees structural differences between the United States and Mexico. If there is “interurban binational flux,” he says, it exists precisely because of structural disparities and inequalities.

These disparities became particularly acute as part of a broader post-9/11 condition, which cemented the border’s role less as an instigator of interaction and more as a consolidator of difference. Two key exceptionalities developed. First, an Agambian state of exception was increasingly applied to the border as a zone that was almost constantly alarmingly “orange,” dangerous, and fertile ground for terrorist invasion. Second, a cultural exceptionality developed that, as the curator Lucía Sanromán and the photographer Ingrid Hernández demonstrate in their pieces here, emerged from within by leading Tijuana filmmakers, anthropologists, architects, and artists eager to interpret and represent their globalizing city through a new generational lens, and from without by curators, cultural critics, and arts journalists who enthusiastically characterized the city as a cultural and artistic hot spot. Or as the New York Times put it (in a piece they Headlined “It’s Hot. It’s Hip. It’s Tijuana?”), “Its fabled lawlessness has become a kind of freedom and license for social mobility and entrepreneurship that has attracted artists and musicians, chefs and restaurateurs, and professionals from Mexico and elsewhere.” Tijuana’s sudden hipness took on particular force in the art world with Tijuana’s art scene landing on the radar of international curators and journalists, suddenly making it the trendiest art city in Mexico between 2003 and 2006. Between 2005 and 2006 alone, three major exhibitions showcased Tijuana-specific art: 2005’s Tijuana Sessions (for ARCO in Madrid, Spain) and Tercera Nación (Tijuana), and 2006’s Strange New World (MCASD, San Diego). This recent art boom has at least a few roots in the successes and global recognition of inSITE, which has long been perhaps the most vocal and consistent proponent of Tijuana as both a site for art (a destination for artists, curators, and critics not from the Tijuana–San Diego region) and a site of artists (the artistic home base of artists living and working in Tijuana). While many celebrated this new attention on Tijuana as a place for something other than violence and vice, others worried that art that was critical of the onslaught of
globalization became an (perhaps inadvertent) advertisement for it. Dubbing Tijuana’s art boom “arte NAFTA” that was spun by curators into a “pop optimism” about the border, Heriberto Yépez wrote that “border art is being manipulated to invent a favorable image of Mexico’s cultural integration with the U.S.”

As Yépez’s own critique made clear, the international attention given Tijuana’s art scene was often paired with the common characterization of Tijuana as the ultimate postmodern city of the third world, the archetypal “third space” of liminality and in-betweenness once theorized by Homi Bhabha. Tijuana’s role as a kind of theorist’s darling begins in 1990 with the publication of Néstor García Canclini’s watershed book, *Culturas híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad*. “During the two periods in which I studied the intercultural conflicts at the Mexican side of the border, in Tijuana, in 1985 and 1988,” he wrote in a passage now famous among borderlands scholars, “it occurred to me at more than one time that this city is, along with New York, one of the greatest laboratories of postmodernity.” For García Canclini, Tijuana’s bilingualism, its continuous cultural mixtures of North and South, its meetings of first and third worlds, made it an exquisitely hybrid city. His characterization gradually helped make Tijuana synonymous with global hybridity and postmodern urbanism, a notion that spread through the popular press, academia, and the art world (Heriberto Yépez’s essay in this collection offers a critique of this trend).

Yet in an interview included here, García Canclini revisits his earlier claims with a more critical eye toward hybridity and the uncritical reappropriations and use of his writing on Tijuana by fellow critics.

As Diana Palaversich and Eduardo Barrera have both noted, García Canclini’s characterization of Tijuana as a postmodern capital was undoubtedly influenced by the 1980s and 1990s performance art work of Guillermo Gómez-Peña and the Border Arts Workshop. Their important performance interventions into discourses of cultural nationalism and cultural purity—launched from the San Diego–Tijuana border—frequently portrayed Tijuana as an ideal site for thinking about binational cultural flows, polyglot tongues, and improvisational borderlands identities that move across the border’s “gap between worlds.” While acutely aware of this tradition (and in some cases, overtly grappling with it), the essays in *Tijuana Dreaming* do not extend this theoretical current and instead go behind the often too-easy romance of Tijuana postmodernism and hybridity to explore the city’s culture and identity through critical lenses that we believe are more generative for understanding the city so that it is not wholly defined by, or synonymous with, the borderline...
itself. The conflation of Tijuana with border has helped enable, to borrow a phrase from Palaversich, Tijuana’s “international blessing as one of the first examples of the brave new postmodern world,” which has tended to distract many scholars and critics outside of the city from examining the social, political, and economic fractures that continue to shape it from within.37

Tijuana may be the Mexican city most visited by U.S. tourists and one of the Mexican cities most referenced when media talk turns to the “crisis” of contemporary border life, yet scholarship and critical writing about Tijuana available in English is scarce. Only one of Tijuana’s contemporary novelists (Luis Humberto Crosthwaite) has had work translated, and not one of the city’s contemporary generation of scholars and critics has seen their long-form work available in English for students, faculty, and interested readers north of the line. As a result, Tijuana is much talked about, but little heard. Courses on border issues tend to rely on the scant, and often very dated, pieces of writing available. Tijuana has been, historically, a city defined by its misrepresentation in myth and fantasy, synonymous with a kind of critical ventriloquism that leaves its own critical and intellectual and artistic voices all too silent in transnational conversations.

This anthology aims to correct that imbalance by including a number of essential articles by leading scholars from Tijuana and greater Mexico in translation for the very first time. The essays explore Tijuana’s cultural life through four central prisms: panoramas that view the city in its broadest cultural, historical, and discursive terms and position contemporary cultural life in Tijuana in the context of the city’s representational history; the new urbanisms that have energized urban planning in Tijuana, new theories of social and civic life and domestic innovation that respond to the city’s unique infrastructural, demographic, and environmental pressures; the cultural developments in visual art, literature, and music that have taken Tijuana’s artistic life beyond conventional discourses of “border art” as they have been deployed in the art world and the academy alike; and globalisms, views of the challenges facing Tijuana in the global age, the ghosts of its cinematic past that cloud its future, the violence and fear that have begun to reshape the city’s sense of itself.

Yet even in the face of this violence and fear, in the face of so many asymmetries and ruptures, the essays in this collection all seem to come back to a love of the city that borders on obsession and is fueled by a critical passion. “In my lifetime,” Yépez writes, “I have not felt a love as profound as the confusing passion that I feel for Tijuana, an obsession that does not preclude criticism and which more accurately provokes sudden repudiation. Tijuana
elicits a crazy love, a narcotic love. Tijuana is addictive.” Tijuana Dreaming is our attempt to pay tribute to that love in all of its diversity, to take those addictions seriously by creating a collection that will help enrich conversations about Tijuana’s role in the current global landscape. Or, to paraphrase something Teddy Cruz once told the New York Times when he was asked why he has focused so much of his work on Tijuana, we assembled this collection because we believe that to study Tijuana is, quite simply, “to be in the midst of the argument.”

Welcome to (a new) Tijuana.

Notes

1 For more on Nortec, see Alejandro Madrid, Nor-Tec Rifa! Electronic Dance Music from Tijuana to the World (Oxford University Press, 2008); and José Manuel Valenzuela (ed.), Paso del Norte: This Is Tijuana! (Trilce, 2004).
4 Harm de Blij, The Power of Place: Geography, Destiny, and Globalization’s Rough Landscape (Oxford University Press, 2008), 32.
5 To be clear, we do not believe that tourism and globalization are mutually exclusive economic and cultural regimes, but that they are in fact very much entangled with one another. It’s a theme that the essays in this collection constantly grapple with: the relationship between the new cultural networks and social structures that emerged in Tijuana in the 1960s as a direct result of border industrialization and previous cultural regimes tied to the binational flows of tourist dollars and tourist fantasies.
7 Jesús Blancornelas, El Cartel (Plaza y Janes, 2002), 39.
8 David Harvey, Spaces of Hope (University of California Press, 2000), 78.
13 Sklair, Assembling for Development, 11.
16 Ibid., 191.
18 For a different take on the ciudad de paso as it is manifest in Tijuana’s oldest residential neighborhood, La Libertad, see Omar Pimentel’s outstanding poetry collection La Libertad: Ciudad de Paso (CECUT, 2006).
19 Lawrence Herzog, “Global Tijuana: The Seven Ecologies of the Border,” in Michael Dear and Gustavo LeClerc (eds.), Postborder City: Cultural Spaces of Bajalta California (Routledge, 2003), 120.
21 Harvey, Spaces of Hope.
22 Ibid., 3.
24 Michael Stepner and Paul Fiske, “San Diego and Tijuana,” in Global City Regions: Their Emerging Forms (Spon Press, 2000); Kevin Lynch and Donald Appleyard, Temporary Paradise? A Look at the Spatial Landscape of the San Diego Region (Report to the City of San Diego, 1974).
26 Dear and Leclerc, Postborder City.
30 Tito Alegria, Metrópolis transfronteriza: Revisión de la hipótesis y evidencias de Tijuana, Mexico y San Diego, Estados Unidos (COLEF, 2009), 24.
32 Heriberto Yépez, Made in Tijuana (ICBC, 2005), 67.
33 Néstor García Canclini, Culturas híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad (Grijalbo, 1990), 233.
34 In his 1990 book, Michael Dear, The Postmodern Urban Condition (John Wiley, 2000), 174–75, continues this idea by making Tijuana a key case study for his analysis of postmodern urbanism.
35 Diana Palaversich, De Macondo a McOndo: Senderos de la postmodernidad latinoamericana (Plaza y Valdes, 2005), 172.
For example, see Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Warrior for Gringostroika* (Graywolf, 1993); and Gomez-Peña, *The New World Border* (City Lights, 1996).

Palaversich, *De Macondo a McOndo*, 172.