

Dislocative Media, A Ghost Story (or how to rub two stones together in the name of trans_bodies to be/come)

DR. AMY SARA CARROLL & RICARDO DOMÍNGUEZ

1. The *Transborder Immigrant Tool* (TBT) is a last mile safety device designed to lead the disoriented and thirsty—regardless of their nationality—to water caches and safety sites on the U.S. side of the Mexico-U.S. border. It is intended to compliment the efforts of humanitarian organizations like Border Angels and Water Station, Inc. Housed on a global positioning system (GPS) enabled platform, TBT is a production of Electronic Disturbance Theatre (EDT)/b.a.n.g. lab, a collaboration among Ricardo, me, Micha Cárdenas, Elle Mehrmand, and Brett Stalbaum, which performs a critical *codeswitch* on multiple registers.

One, dislocating the code of locative media, it revalences the so-called “ideological neutrality” of walking tools, while also decentering locative media’s urban bent. Two, interrogating “the language of new media”’s accent on the prosaic, TBT activates a conceptual poetics. Three, in the spirit of much post-1968 collective artmaking, it is impervious to the supposed borders between art and activism.

TBT sports a user-friendly compass interface. It also includes prose poems as audio files, which offer information about desert survival in multiple languages, redistributing facts comparable to those provided in basic desert survival manuals, including ones issued by the U.S. military or briefly by the Mexican government. We have presented this series of poetry, interspersed with poems from a second series (more explicit in its conceptual experimentation), in various museum, gallery, and performance venues. The pair function as a single performative utterance, elongated as the Mexican “isthmus,” rhetorical as the question, “What constitutes sustenance?”

2. With TBT, we seek to remaster the acronym GPS per Laura Borrás and Juan Gutierrez’s reflections on a “Global Poetic System” (2009).¹ Since 1994, network/software art,

¹ See <http://www.hyperrhiz.net/hyperrhiz06/19-essays/74-electronic-literature-as-an-information-system>, accessed 10/10/10.

from tactical media to hacktivism, has hidden behind the slogan “More Than Just Art!” TBT is a fractal gesture that is no longer part of the histories of network art’s attachment to camouflage ecologies, named by Alex Galloway and Thacker in their book *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks* (2007) as an allegiance to the “imperceptible” or “non-existence” (135).

Through TBT, we aspire to create translucent tunnels into the electronic market as art and something other. The post-contemporary moment demands artwork that, as gestures of visibility, can haunt the fictions of market, of the state. With TBT, we strive to exceed our own expectations that art must spook the forms and contents of globalization as network or cloud, though. Through and with this project, we also conspire to connect real bodies to data-bodies as trans_bodies, to disturb the atmospheric conditions of post-post 9/11 (1973/2001) in/securities.

3. We went to Port Bou, Spain, to guide a ghost to the United States. Aiding and abetting unlawful entry into the United States is a federal felony. You cannot speak openly of shepherding a human being across the border. A ghost is another matter entirely.

4. Borders are not boundaries, but performatives and performativities that crisscross the catastrophe of the state; they have the potentiality to represent a stateless-aesthetic gone awry. Even as they police, they also gesture towards evidence of “a turning” without the return of tragedy—as that self-knowledge that sacrifices myths of community in the name of activating Justice—as a catastrophe without re-turn. Just as the *Oresteia* (Aeschylus 458 B.C.) constructs martyrs as disastrous stars enclosed by the force of Law-without-law, without Justice, the Benjaminian ghost we implicitly invoke, via such a vision of borders, disrupts the fault-line of the post-contemporary function of Empire as one crisis after another.

The French collective Tiqqun writes in *Introduction to Civil War* (2010), as surely as Naomi Klein contends in *Disaster Capitalism* (2007): “Empire functions best when crisis is ubiquitous. Crisis is Empire’s regular mode of existence [...] the temporality of Empire is the temporality of emergency and catastrophe” (Tiqqun 2010: 126). TBT ghosts the anomie of mobilized bordering that repeats, restores and dislocates tragedy as a non-sovereign engine of indecision calling only for more martyrs to sacrifice. In the latter scenario, everyone becomes a victim—“even the oppressors.” Yet, learning from Benjamin, we’d counter an *in between*, an *among*. Between, among the catastrophe of petrified borders of history, the tragedy-without-return of disaster capitalisms, and the materialization of baroque tyrannies of atavistic globalization—an Empire of disorders—from each of these enclosures arises alter-specters,

alter-eucatastrophes, and alter-disasters that, as the positive remainders of trauma, recombine at times; resist constellation at others. A phantom standing reserve without reservation. Our Benjaminian revenant stands in for this unquantifiable variable. But, he is one, while we speak of *more than many* who have an ur-name—that of *transborder_bodies*.

5. In August 2010, an uncanny opposition floated, recirculated as air—that of refrigerated trailer trucks. At the end of July, before seventy-two migrants' bodies were found in the northern Mexican state of Tamaulipas, fifty-one bodies were discovered in mass graves east of Monterrey, Mexico.² Using backhoes to dig up the deceased, Mexican soldiers temporarily stored their grisly evidence of narco-violence in refrigerated trailer trucks. In eerily consonant contrast, on the U.S. side of the border, Arizona's Pima county coroner in July saw an uptick of crossers found dead in the desert from heat-related causes. "To accommodate the bodies" in the triple digit temperatures, the county parked a fifty-foot refrigerated trailer truck in the coroner's receiving area.³

It's hard not to ponder the ironies of this juxtaposition as they relate to the perilous terms of crossing. It's also hard not to return to Luis Alberto Urrea's transcriptions of a Mexican consul's observations in *The Devil's Highway: A True Story* (2004). After the dead bodies of the "Yuma 14" were flown via chartered jet home to their villages in Veracruz, Rita Vargas considered the costs of their special transport (\$68,000). "What if," she asked, "somebody had simply invested that amount in their villages to begin with?"

6. TBT is border disturbance art that, conjuring a geo-aesthetic meets geo-ethics gesture against the boundaries which crisscross every single body on the planet, boots up at the nanoscale, interpellating itself into the GPS grid which envelopes our planet in its opaque mists. Imagine a geo-aesthetics that connects both the human and the inhuman, geography and ethics. Imagine a geo-aesthetics that crosses into and dislocates the fog of geo-spatial mobility that rallies ethical objects and multiple forms of sustenance.

² See <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-mexico-bodies-20100825,0,2229485.story> and <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/jul/25/world/la-fg-mexico-bodies-20100725>, both accessed 10/10/10.

³ See <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-border-deaths-20100824,0,5950093.story>, accessed 10/10/10.

If we live in a world where goods and services *a priori* have rights to cross borders, where things and proto-things create wireless clouds of data, of access and containment, where a chaosmosis of markets demands aggressive state social filters, we seek, via TBT, to account for the performative complexities of the *new earths* upon which we walk and those to come, a geo-aesthetics that recognizes the cartographies of *trans_bodies* with *transborder* rights as both a necessity and on the horizon. We set our watch, our watches against disorientation in the service of an artwork to ark a geo-philosophy for bodies that already are flowing as *trans_borders* across the continent's arcs. Key practices that fractalize our geo-aesthetic include activism, tactical poetics, hacktivism(s), new media theatre, border disturbance technologies, augmented realities, queer technologies, transnational feminisms and code, digital Zapatismo, intergalactic performance, _____ (please help us to fill in the blanks and voids).

7. If you ride the train from Barcelona to the French border, Port Bou is the last Spanish stop you'll encounter. A guarded fishing village in possession of an Arcadian train depot, Port Bou has reproduced various scenes of "migrant melancholia" (Schmidt Camacho 2008) over the course of the twentieth century. In the 1920s via its eponymously named "La route Lister" over the Pyrenees, Spanish Civil War Republican General Lister smuggled supporters and soldiers across the Spanish-Franco border. In the 1940s, European Jews and others attempting to escape the Nazis' invading France, also risked their lives on "La route Lister," dreaming of Buenos Aires or New York by way of Casablanca or Tangiers. Even now, guidebooks speak of North Africans and Eastern Europeans' gambling on "no questions asked" anonymity in Port Bou. In sum, it is a border town.

Of course, Port Bou celebrates one migrant, who 'chose' to remain. Walter Benjamin's makeshift memorialization is practically a cottage industry, certainly Port Bou's supplemental income. In a small kiosk for tourists in the village's centre, guides sell the catalogue for Israeli artist Dani Karavan's permanent "environment," *Homage to Walter Benjamin* (1994) and a couple of other books. Or, for the more economically minded, there are postcards, which juxtapose the Port Bou of the 1940s with its 2004 successor.

On the rainy, summer day we arrive, we walk Port Bou's tiny harbor-side promenade, taking in the Mediterranean, the dramatic framing device of the jagged seaside cliffs. We descend steep steps to the level of the water and a narrow beach. We collect sea stones and shells. The sunset is muted by the heavy cloud cover as if the sky were huddled beneath a thick down blanket. In the dwindling twilight, we

find and linger outside the former Hotel de Francia where Benjamin committed suicide. When we return to the small bed and breakfast (with the tree, growing through two of its stories) where we're staying, the contrast is striking: in lieu of a white-washed facade and shuttered windows, these walls are covered—ceiling to floor—with drawings, photographs, newspaper clippings, magazine articles that “tangentially translate” Benjamin’s relationship to the village.

8. Our own fragmentary excess approximates hieroglyphs in anticipation of data clouds (a-cumulus nimbus) where everything that is solid melts into the Wi-Fi air. We are the locative artifacts that William Gibson anticipates in his 2007 novel *Spook Country*.

There, he describes locative art as an aesthetic to monumentalize the holographic dead. In Gibson’s vision of cloud Empire we are all the augmented realities of the deceased River Jude Phoenix or F. Scott Fitzgerald. In *Spook Country* the characters travel between all that is lost to “cartographic attributes of the invisible” and the specific coordinates of locative realities. Everything is falling between the cracks of hyper-tagging and the wave point edges of new recombinant realities, “The artist annotating every centimetre of a place, of every physical thing. Visible to all, on devices such as these” (2007: 24). Gibson’s locative media machines bring forth the dead and the lost before the eyes of the forced forgetting policies of the spook-state. The strategies that Gibson names move from pre-emptive strike politics and military action to softer media tactics that utilize the affective politics of fear, however. To all of the above, we whisper, “Boo!”—a hauntological counter-stroke.

For, in Gibson’s chillingly plausible rendition of the “future five minutes from now,” the spook-state attempts to colonize the virtual to get to the real, or, we might say, to harness the untimeliness of the event—an event that fractures the fractality between the virtual and actual—that manifests the locative perversity of those living and breathing beyond the holographic graveyard. Let us then consider in contrast the aesthetic event-based technology of TBT’s performative matrix as a mobile built environment to divert the flows of disappearance towards the mythopoetic non-locations of un/accountable presence, of the all too human’s crossing. Paradoxically, in this instance, what passes as the mythopoetic slows down the hypermedia of always being switched “ON.” The mythopoetic has the potential to attune data bodies to the slow digital Dasein that always already is linked to locations that cut and paste the borderscapes around us. Through the mythopoetic (pace Gloria Anzaldúa [1987], pace *The Headmap Manifesto*⁴), with TBT, we seek to finger the deep cuts,

⁴ See <http://tecfa.unige.ch/~nova/headmap-manifesto.PDF>, accessed 1/20/11.

“las heridas abiertas” across the event—a borderlands—of mutant desires against the abstract machine. If in *Spook Country* one of the characters never sleeps under the same GPS “grid” twice for fear of linking his body to his GPS coordinates, the trans_border body we conjure never sleeps under the same borderless borders of “grid.” Still, this body needs sustenance and trans_rights.

9. Garbage. Delilah Montoya’s series of photographs, *Sed: A Trail of Thirst* (2004) takes up the question, “Who and what constitutes the disposable?” reframing it in terms of what we leave behind. Her images map a migrant path across Arizona’s Sonoran Desert. Abandoned campsites, lost or discarded items, lone water stations.⁵ A recent case overturned by the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals (September 2, 2010) also contemplates the forms and contents of “garbage.” More specifically, its majority opinion hinges on the definition of “garbage,” while its dissenting opinion seeks to shift attention away from the word “garbage” to that of “littering.”

In contrast, within the text of *The United States of America v. Daniel J. Millis*, there is only passing reference to its defendant’s testimony, “At his bench trial, Millis admitted that he had placed the bottles of water on the refuge. However, he testified that leaving water out for illegal immigrants constitutes humanitarian aide and that ‘humanitarian aide is never a crime’” (2010: 13294).

And, nestled into the dissenting opinion, a lonelier reference to the ‘Other’ debris in the Arizona Buenos Aires Federal Wildlife Refuge: “At trial, Officer Kirkpatrick testified that ‘there was a great deal of trash on the refuge,’ which consisted of ‘water bottles, backpacks, ...articles of clothing, foodstuffs, vehicles,’ and ‘pretty much anything you can imagine’” (ibid: 13306).

A briefcase with an extant manuscript?

10. Through TBT, we seek to experiment with an activism that probes the conditions of post-Fordist factories of the “no-place,” that signals where the gaps leak beyond networked (post/super)modernity, that forces the Cloud Empire to stutter its demands, its glitches. Through TBT, we aspire to capture the Cloud Empire’s majoritarian being as the post-9/11 incarnation of a nanofest destiny of the floating interactive-state-machine. The Cloud Empire, all dressed up in the neoliberal rhetoric of free choice, demands that everything and everyone participate in software culture to

⁵ Montoya’s images first arrested our attention when we viewed *Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement* (2008) at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Some of *Sed: A Trail of Thirst* is reproduced in that show’s catalog.

organize the infinite databases that standardize market relations between real bodies and data-bodies.

Standardization is the key strategy for a functional production-consumption subjectivation diagram. But, what manifest densities escape this code's execution? We'd propose that TBT rehearses the dislocative materialities of precarious trans_ontologies, which demand a distributed prescience of each unique trans_body—without and within database clouds.

11. Benjamin's compulsive engagement with the allegorical enabled his ruinous "cultural studies." Or, was it the reverse?

In response to *The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire*, Theodor Adorno famously confided to Benjamin, "If one wished to put it drastically, one could say that your study is located at the crossroads of magic and positivism. That spot is bewitched. Only theory could break the spell" (quoted in Cohen 1998: 2). Tom Cohen projects the paralysis that Adorno identifies in Benjamin's corpus onto "the age of cultural studies" (ibid).

We are less interested in reading literally for theory's absence, more invested in the mechanisms, vestiges of 'bewitchment,' which animate the aesthetic to theorize and enact its 'objects of inquiry.' In "las ruinas de un edificio nunca construido" (Sarlo 2000: 24), could we conjure a comparative border, cultural, ethnic, postcolonial, gender and sexuality, _____ (fill-in-the-blank again) studies that negates prevailing negations of the para/aesthetic (i.e., Yúdice's "the expediency of culture" [2004]) to champion in "colaboration" the latter's dormant totipotency? Could we risk (or afford *not* to risk) hospitality, Derrida's injunction, "Let us say yes to *who* or *what* turns up, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any *identification*, whether or not it has to do with a foreigner, an immigrant, an invited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal, or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female" (2000: 77)?

12. Tiqqun writes, Imperialism and totalitarianism mark the two ways in which the modern State tried to leap beyond its own impossibility, first by slipping forward beyond its borders into colonial expansion, then by an intensive deepening of the penetration inside its own borders. In both cases, these desperate reactions from the State—which claimed to encompass *everything* just as it was becoming *nothing*—came to a head in the very forms of civil war the State claims *preceded* it. (2010: 109)

This *nothing* that preceded the *everything* of Cloud Empire is taking shape around the question of oceans of data. In fact, data is floating on and within oceans like so much flotsam and jetsam of Modernity's repeating islands. These oceans have been a core condition for empire historically. Google now has oceanic datacenters to support the new Cloud Empire, to solve the heat building up of millions upon millions of processors that are using tidal waters to smooth out emergent power, to create water cycles of subjugation. But, the Cloud Empire is only in part a reflection of Google's off shoring of critical infrastructure.

The force of endless logistical-data-objects is separating national-data-borders. Old cyberborders are unravelling as surely as the conceptual borders of the super-state machine—against all trans_bodies—re-gerrymander their forms. Cloud Empire core computing absorbs, sponge-like, more and more social and economic media on planetary scales. Trans_border bodies, like old citizen formations, are losing rights before the powers of end-user agreements.

The new civil war on the Cloud Empire by trans_border bodies cannot be about reinscribing the link between territory and state, about reasserting the intimacies of jurisdiction and law. Instead we must loosen the tides and ticks; we must re-cite the flows of alter-globalization that move trans_bodies from illegal bodies to extra-legal post-things—with the full rights of post-human flows and deep locative articulations of place. (And, to this open end, we remember the Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico, one of the first sets of trans_bodies to call for a *planetary civil war*.)

13. Rosa Alcalá's collection of poetry *Undocumentaries* (2010) foregrounds the power of the prefix "un-" as surely as Samuel Weber claims Benjamin's writings fall back on a suffix, insufficiently translatable as "-abilities" (2008). Alcalá's fixation with "un-" interrupts a hegemonic documentary performative that the Border Industrial Program (1965), seemingly mandated in anticipation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (1994). Sandy Soto describes the phenomenon without naming it as such: "an implicit binary opposition of order and disorder [...] uncritically organize[s] representation[s]" (Soto 2007: 420) of the U.S.-Mexico border.

Alcalá riffs, "The office for agents/Is the etymology of factory [...]It reads properties/for poetries. Factory is both fact/and act, and mere letters away from face/and story." *Undocumentaries* demonstrates an agility, an ability to recognize proxy, proximity. Words slip into one another (or not)—properties and poetries, fact/act and face/story. Alcalá privileges flows over blockage, surveillance, even when mismatch overshadows connection. The result: a diffusion, a defusion, a softening of the aforementioned binary logic.

“Hard facts” that prevail? Paradoxically, the Mexican-U.S. borderlands’ “season of dying” demands a supersession of both the dematerialization of the object (be it art or cartography...) and the dematerialization of the subject (the human being). The “politics of the question,” which we aspire to enact through TBT—like Alcalá’s exercises in “undocumentation”—amounts to a latitudinal attunement, an auto-interpellation into “the song of the nonaligned world,” which registers and resists the Mexico-U.S. border as a set of literal and imaginary geographies ad infinitum.

14. Maurice Blanchot proposes in the first sentence of *The Writing of the Disaster* (1995) “The disaster ruins everything.” It also leaves “everything intact” (1). The disaster dislocates catastrophic knowledge with a non-forgetting that crosses out, that goes across and against the grain of dissociation and forgetting, necessary for the borderization of knowledge, epistemologies of enclosure. Trans_bodies cross out concretely (as in concrete poetry), enjambling the future and the now. The disaster links trans_bodies with different experiences to different temporal scales. It binds us by doing away with that which is common and by forcing us to face the possibility of visceral relationality. It depends upon an aesthetics of the overwrite/right. The uncommon movement of crossing creates a geography of ethics, a planetary geo-aesthetics. The disaster is an un-event of relayed/delayed affects/effects that revels in the possibilities of spaces where histories-to-come can be told, witnessed and made through trans_kinships (constellations, associations, alliances, relations) as *undocumentary* gestures of, in and outside of the ruins of the future*now*.

15. Benjamin Walter. Port Bou officials reversed Walter Benjamin’s name on his death certificate. They also listed him as “Catholic.” Although Port Bou banks on Benjamin’s memory (at least its quaint buildings with neat placards’ landmarking his points of interests do so in English, Spanish, and Catalan), the village harbors a laissez-faire attitude toward the cemetery where the philosopher’s remains supposedly were placed first in a niche (rented by Frau Gurland for five years at seventy-five pesetas), and later transferred to a *fosa común*. But, only months after his death, Hannah Arendt, visiting the cemetery, could not find her cousin. To Gershom Scholem she lamented, “his name was not written anywhere.”

Michael Taussig muses on this mismatch between name and body, finally reading it as “allegorical.” He concludes, “The wind howls up there. It has its own name, the *transmontaña*, its own personality, its mysterious origins and reasons for being. In the Spring and again in Autumn it is so strong it bowls you over.

Can we imagine a state, a religion, or a community bound to remembrance, which would have the courage or craziness to call a wind a monument?” (2006: 30).

16. Deleuze and Guattari state in *What is Philosophy?* (1996) “Art is not a notion but a motion. It’s not important what art is but what it does.” What lines of flight does TBT as an ethico-aesthetic codeswitch, “do”? (66).

We’d argue that TBT allows trans_bodies to make visible their desertion of the state machine as constituting a *civil war*. TBT aids trans_bodies in cutting the landscape of globalization with the force of a hope of being-more-than labour, of becoming more than disposable. And, through TBT, we reject the non-place of the supermodernity posited by Marc Augé in his book *Non-places, Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (2009). TBT dislocates literal and imaginative borders as non-places, re-marking them as “Global Poetic Systems” for the invention of new functions that manifest the visible trans_lives of those who “flee” from one place to another and those who stand, counter-frictions to the machine.

“The Taste of Abundance” (1981), an essay by Paolo Virno, touches on the theme of relocating lines of flight as exodus:

Disobedience and flight are not in any case a negative gesture that exempts one from action and responsibility. To the contrary, to desert means to modify the conditions within which the conflict is played instead of submitting to them. And the positive construction of a favourable scenario demands more initiative than the clash with pre-fixed conditions. An affirmative ‘doing’ qualifies defec-tion, impressing a sensual and operative taste on the present. The conflict is engaged starting from what we have forms of life out of which we are already making experience. To the ancient idea of fleeing in order to better attack is added the certainty that the fight will be all the more effective if one has something else to lose besides one’s own chains. (49)

Through TBT, we seek to modify globalization’s mapping of labor migrations by echo-relocating the emergence of another wave of subject(s) in motion. We are not referring to the post-Fordist *multitude* or the illegal immigrant under ‘house arrest,’ but, to trans_border subjects in hyper-exodus who already crash network art and networked power’s logics of invisibility by “fleeing” into fields of perception, of corporeality beyond the GPS grid. Transversing existing political maps, these individuals who desert—compose new earths, new earthworks, beholden only “to what in eco-philosophy is known as recessive ethics” (Boetzkes 2010: 4).

17. In March 2010, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security announced that the virtual portion of the separation barrier erected along the U.S.-Mexico border had proven ineffective, manifesting numerous technical glitches, notably a hyper-vigilant inability to distinguish among wind, sage brush, and human beings. More recently, the Department of Homeland Security has junked the separation barrier, Boeing's SBInet, whose networked sensors once were heralded as "the ultimate in anti-illegal immigrant technology" (2011).⁶

Chantal Akerman's often overlooked documentary, *De l'autre côté* (2002) depends upon a series of high-lonesome establishing shots. Her camera pans across expanses of desert where the wind whips through the sage brush, each a spook of the virtual barrier. *De l'autre côté* outs its subject—a shift in migration, prompted by socially dramatic reconfigurations of border wall-fence ecologies—what displaced would-be undocumented entrants from the light-up-the-border campaign stretches of Mexico-California to the alternately treacherous, increasingly narco-driven, intemperate zones of Mexico-Arizona's "devil's highway[s]." *De l'autre côté's* long-winded silences, in the tradition of Akerman's "images within images" (see Sultan and Akerman 2008), remain as deceptive as this stretch of the border's own alleged historical emptiness, that which *De l'autre côté* renders as a cacophonous roar.

18. TBT recognizes the immanent creation of new rights beyond the biopolitical zone of the border—a zone that since the start of Operation Gatekeeper and, then, September 11, 2001, has become more dangerous than ever. The tactical force of trans_bodies flowing through the border liminality is the epitome of "risk"—not because crossers are "illegal" or "unauthorized;" but, because they re-make the condition of what continental citizenship could mean, shifting its foundations beyond the "laws of borders" and the "laws of free trade."

Put differently, the borderless border has not stopped migration North. As Rita Raley registers in her book *Tactical Media* (2009):

Indeed, by all accounts the numbers appear to be at an historic high—so what other purposes does the borderless border serve? Etienne Balibar writes in a different context about the symbolic power of "obsessive and showy security practices" at the border, which are "designed [...] as much for shows as for real action." What would be the socio-cultural function of such "shows"? Peter Andreas's important study, *Border Games: Policing the U.S.-Mexico Divide*, provides some answers. Noting that

⁶ See <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2011/01/homeland-security-junks-its-sensor-laden-border-fence/>, accessed 1/17/11.

"successful" border management depends on successful image management [which] does not necessarily correspond with levels of actual deterrence," Andreas concludes that border control is a "public performance for which the border functions as a kind of political stage." In other words, the performance of security is more important than actual security and the theatrical serves as a substitute for the real. The miles of razor wire, the ubiquity of 'boots on the ground,' the air support—they are all material entities, but they are also crucially part of what Andreas names as a "symbolic performance." "Border control efforts," he explains, "are not only *actions* (a means to a stated instrumental end) but also *gestures* that communicate meaning." (36)

Trans_bodies crossing borders on a planetary scale rehearse new forms of visible trans_rights. Their sheer number will lead to a modification of existing laws and the invention of new rights. They re-engineer the performative matrix contra the "escalating symbolic performance" of border control.

19. Jay Parini melodramatically stages Benjamin's last words in his novel *Benjamin's Crossing* (1997):

"*Tikkun Olam,*" he whispered. The repair of the world. "*Tikkun olam.*" (281)

Benjamin actually wrote in his farewell/suicide note to Henny Gurland (one of his two final traveling companions, mother of José): "This is a situation from which there is no escape, I have no option but to finish here in a small village in the Pyrenees where nobody knows that my life's draining away." He went on to quote Kafka, "There's plenty of hope, but not for us."

What, if anything, does Benjamin have in common with the contemporary migrant? We might process Benjamin's last sentiments as suggestive of the thinker's affinities with the circumstances of today's border-crossing "wet mind." We also might draw parallels between his plight and the dire circumstances of the poorest of the poor contemporary train-hopper or foam-walker. Sebastião Salgado's universal exile. The economic sociopolitical refugee. As so many scholars of the postcolonial, of the subaltern, of the global, of the neoliberal, of the digital (divide) note: individuals/collectives—adrift from their "origins"—far outnumber the citizens of our planet's most populous nation-state.

20. The tunnels of neo-modernity and global industrialization are re-designing reality as we speak. Via their own, post-Taylor-made "relational aesthetics" (Bourriaud 2002), objects become networks of things: iPad desires, texting transgressions, data power clouds, airport scan-bodies, Facebook economics... Let's shorthand this phenomenon as the almost fully amorphous *Cloud Empire* whose logistical

capture-objects arrive before our optical nerves and fingers as design fragments, built in pieces in one place, put together in another, and delivered via multiple routes after or before we consume. Better yet, let's acknowledge that we're *captured by their logistical-thingness*. This is the same logistics that (could) govern the flows and protocols of *trans_bodies*—their borderscapes, their movement towards an extra-legal formation, their territorial remixing, their counter-computational processing, their modes of desire, and their methods for crisscrossing (by foot, by boat, by Photoshop document, by becoming the most wanted/unwanted labour bodies demanded by the global market...) though.

Seventy to eighty per cent of goods for the global market are at any given moment in transit and this massive migration of goods is paralleled only by the flow of *trans_bodies*, crossing borders everywhere, *trans_bodies* who are forced to sacrifice their rights, their persons, and their kinships to the “just in time” circulation system of the Cloud Empire. The alternative spin on this techno-science disaster lurks in the space of border tunnels (at the “terrorist assemblages” of Israel/Palestine, Mexico/the United States [Puar 2009]). There is a traffic in *trans_bodies* contra the over-determined assembly line/ation of the world. Imagine *trace/rs* on a map of connections between things and humans. Strange close encounters among logistical objects, *trans_bodies*, and the sovereignty foreshadow what the futures could be—multi-nodal and scalar, exceeding the Cloud Empire's objects and object-making in route.

21. In *Notes on Conceptualisms* (2009), Rob Fitterman and Vanessa Place claim, “Conceptual writing is allegorical writing” (13). No doubt. But, through TBT, we'd argue that one can appeal neither to the “allegorical” nor to “conceptualisms”—let alone link the two—without accounting for site-specificities, makeshift periods, ecstasies of influence. TBT summons the ghosts of Latin/o American conceptual—isms, ranging from those elaborated by Luis Camnitzer (2007) to those implicitly flagged in such exhibitions as *Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement* (2008) to those which could be gathered under the sign of “border (disturbance) art” to those which have yet to coalesce at the nexus of the Zapatista “Our Word Is Our Weapon” communiqué, documentary poetics, poetic conceptualisms à la Place and Fitterman, flarf, electronic literature, earthworks, “Queer Technology,” net art 3.0, to be continued...

22. Network art (net art/net.art)/software art attempted modes of aesthetic disappearance. It strove to become vacuoles of non-communication, epitomized in and by the slogan, “Get off the radar!” Its m.o. was hibernation, dreaming deep inside

networked tunnels. But another signal was also at play under the sign of the invisible during the 1990's—the ontologies of being hyper-present, of being all too visible to the state machine (a utopian plagiarist remix of Henry David Thoreau's “Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine!”).

EDT's practice of Electronic Civil Disobedience (ECD) should be understood as the visible manifestation of a hook-up between data bodies and real bodies (albeit more than a one-night stand!). The dichotomy between the digital and the physical is a false god. As our collaborator, Micha Cárdenas insists, “ECD involves a number of physical components, from the hardware that web page is displayed on and the JavaScript it runs on, to the human body that activates that code.” The bodies participating in ECD “are on the radar!” The myth of anonymity does not apply to EDT's aesthetic practices of ECD. The performative matrix of EDT constructs more fluid forms of embodiment-participants in a virtual sit-in are not necessarily restricted to the same rules and protocols of gender, sexuality, race, or religion which they may experience everyday body—*trans_bodies* here with the use of any of relational systems of communication (from a webpage to a cell phone) open themselves up to becoming visible organs without bodies connected to their specific bodies. *Trans_bodies* flash virtual potentials, they smolder ‘real’ as *real bodies becoming augmented visceral realities with surprising new organs and organizational schemata to circumvent the oppressions of logistical assembly line/ation*.

23. The glass is cracked as if someone wanted to break through to the other side. “It is more arduous to honour the memory of the nameless than that of the renowned. Historical construction is devoted to the memory of the nameless.” G.S.I. 1241

It is hard to turn around and climb up again.

No neatly manicured lawns stretch like carpets for attendants in waiting here. Karavan's “environment” clearly understands: on this high, desolate stretch of coast, it is the natural environs which prevail as if the breaking waves recited the dead's Kaddish over and over to the linden and lemon trees' surrounding the graveyard. Arendt described this place as breathtakingly beautiful.

Homage to Walter Benjamin's weathered steps beckon in intense dialogue with the landscape. Inset into the side of the mountain, from the exterior, this sea salt oxidized built environ looks like a great triangle joined with another to enclose a passageway. Eighty-seven steps dead-end in a glass rectangular panel, which, takes on the appearance of a portal for space and time travel. *How thin the membrane separating the living from the dead*.

24. We might ask how TBT dislocates the remnants of the catastrophe and the disaster in the post-contemporary moment as a minor aesthetic or transcendental -ism that creates passages for the allo-martyr, that faces the violent apotheosis all around us vis-à-vis a re-theocratizing of the future-now and its mirror calls for posthuman singularity. TBT represents a sinthomatic disturbance of the ruins yet to be built by transborder_bodies—not of meaning but of being and becoming—not of the law, but of the allo-ontologies of justice. Just us.

25. The likeness is uncanny: The firm Rael Sanfratello Architects, in response to calls for the redesign of the U.S.-Mexico border wall/separation barrier, envisions a luminous doorway, an oxidized “environment” to rival Karavan’s. Could we enter one portal, but exit through the other?

26. TBT is a softwhere through which we imagine a join, a join with trans_bodies in their aesthetic performance of virtual democracies to come as forms-of-life beholden to trans_rights. This trans_body gesture risks internalizing geographies of place (homes, lands, scents, local imaginaries). It celebrates minor singularities smuggled into biopolitical zones of the Cloud Empire vis-à-vis borderless borders. It revels in the refusals of invisibility, reasserting the primacies of footnotes and postscripts. With it, we walk into the alleged *nothingness* of “anti-anti utopian” futurities as surely as we walk into the Sonoran Desert (Muñoz 2009).

27. TBT has garnered such remarkable ‘reviews’ as that of U.S. news commentator and political pundit Glenn Beck’s website, *The Blaze*, its August 31, 2010 pronouncement that TBT’s “explicit poetry threatens to dissolve the nation.”⁷ *The Blaze*’s hyperbole evidences the aesthetics of right wing punditry, but also attests to the first phase of TBT’s deployment as a *conceptual* intervention.

Between excitable and fearless speech (Butler 1997, Foucault 2001)—that spot is codeswitched.

A poem-in-motion to remap the continent. An earthwork to interrupt discourses which, ensconced in their own aesthetics of market-oriented-transparency meets military-industrial-complex, reduce the would-be crosser to debris or felon. Between the lower-cased border of Mexico and the United States and the upper-cased

⁷ See <http://www.theblaze.com/stories/ucsd-professors-want-to-dissolve-us-give-gps-phones-with-explicit-poetry-to-illegals-for-border-crossing/>, accessed 1/20/11.

Borders of theory, art, literature, public policy..., per Jacques Rancière, we submit, “The real must be fictionalized in order to be thought” (2004: 38). Poetry and water are not equivalents; but, the new toxic wave of U.S. culture wars leaves us thirsty for more expansive readings of engagement.

28. Trans [] infinities dancing on the void: e-vents arrive on dove’s feet, they surprise us in the moment of greatest silence, e-vents a-void the void of the [empty set] by engendering parallel universes that call on us to “share the labour” of what is to be done without Infinity. All locative situations echo back the aleph [], the empty brackets, like rattling handcuffs that become state-sanctioned attempts to contain infinities, to lockdown the set [] and throw away the key. TBT exceeds the singularity of Infinity by overflowing the set, by naming the pluralized trans [] infinities that never relinquish what the catastrophe of borders subtract—the logics of an aberrant ethics=aesthetics that moves within and alongside us *sin nombre*.

29. We are listening for the wind’s cadences, cached in the sea stones and shells that we collected on Port Bou’s beach. Like the sound of two chips of “messianic time,” rubbed together, their frottage—what’s remaindered—reminds us that the post-neoliberal resides not in a future tense, but in the historical-contemporary’s translucently infinite conjugal conjugations.

Works cited

- Akerman, Chantal. *De l'autre côté*. 2002. 103 minutes.
- Alcalá, Rosa. *Undocumentaries*. Exeter: Shearsman Books, 2010.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands: La Frontera*. San Francisco: aunt lute books, 1987.
- Augé, Marc. *Non-places, Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. U.K.: Verso; 2 edition, 2009.
- Blanchot, Maurice. *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.
- Boetzkes, Amanda. *The Ethics of Earth Art*. Minnesota: University Of Minnesota Press, 2010.
- Bourriand, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance, et al. France: Les presses du réel, 2002 [1998].
- Brady, Mary Pat. *Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies: Chicana Literature and the Urgency of Space*. Durham: Duke U. P., 2002.
- Butler, Judith. *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Camacho, Alicia Schmidt. *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*. New York: NYU Press, 2008.
- Camnitzer, Luis. *Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007.
- Cohen, Tom. *Ideology and Inscription: “Cultural Studies” after Benjamin, de Man, and Bakhtin*. Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1998.

Galloway, Alex and Thacker, Eugene. *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Janis Tomlinson and Graham Burchell III. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Hospitality*, trans. Rachel Bowlby. Stanford: Stanford U. P., 2000.

Fitterman, Rob and Vanessa Place. *Notes on Conceptualisms*. Brooklyn: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2009.

Foucault, Michel. *Fearless Speech*, ed. Joseph Pearson. New York: Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents, 2001.

Gibson, William. *Spook Country*. New York: The Berkley Publishing Group, 2007.

González, Rita, Howard Fox, and Chon Noriega, curators. *Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement* (exhibit catalog). Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2008.

Karavan, Dani. *Homage to Walter Benjamin: "Passages", Place of Remembrance at Portbou*. Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1995.

Klein, Naomi. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. New York: Henry Holt and Co, 2007.

Kwon, Miwon. *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004.

Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press, 2009.

Parini, Jay. *Benjamin's Crossing*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997.

Place, Vanessa and Robert Fitterman. *Notes on Conceptualisms*. New York: Ugly Duckling Presse, 2009.

Puar, Jasbir K. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham: Duke U. P., 2007.

Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics*, translated by Gabriel Rockhill. New York: Continuum, 2004.

Raley, Rita. *Tactical Media*. Minnesota: University Of Minnesota Press, 2009.

Sarlo, Beatriz. *Siete ensayos sobre Walter Benjamin*. México: fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000.

Scheurmann, Ingrid and Konrad, eds. *For Walter Benjamin: Documentation, Essays and a Sketch*, translated by Timothy Nevill. Bonn, Germany: AsKI, 1993.

Soto, Sandra K. "Seeing Through Photographs of Borderlands (Dis)order." *Latino Studies* 5 (2007): 418-438.

Sultan, Terry and Chantal Akerman. *Chantal Akerman: Moving Through Time and Space* (catalog). Houston: Blaffer Gallery (The Art Museum of the University of Houston), 2008.

Taussig, Michael. *Walter Benjamin's Grave*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006.

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden and Resistance to Civil Government*, edited by William Rossi. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992.

Tiqun. *Introduction to Civil War* translated by Alex R. Galloway and Jason E. Smith. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2010. *United States of America v. Daniel J. Millis*. 09-10134 D.C. No. 4:08-CR-01211-CKJ (9th Cir. 2010).

Urrea, Luis Alberto. *The Devil's Highway: A True Story*. New York: Little, Brown, and Co., 2004.

Weber, Samuel. *Benjamin's—abilities*. Cambridge: Harvard U. P., 2008.

Virno, Paolo. *Esercizi di esodo. Linguaggio e azione politica*, trans. Gerald Raunig. Verona: ombre corte, 2002.

Yúdice, George. *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era*. Durham: Duke U. P., 2003.

Dreams of Corporal Reprogramming (To technically subdue the catastrophe... to instigate it, perhaps?)

PAULA SIBILIA

The body of any thing whatever that takes nourishment constantly dies and is constantly renewed [...] But if you restore as much is destroyed day by day, then as much of the life is renewed as is consumed, just as the flame of the candle is fed by the nourishment afforded by the liquid of this candle, which flame continually with a rapid supply restores to it from below as much as is consumed in dying above [...] and the continuance of the smoke is equal to the continuance of the nourishment, and in the same instant all the flame is dead...

LEONARDO DA VINCI

Just as we routinely engage in sex today for its relational and sensual gratification, we will gain the opportunity to disconnect the eating of food from the function of delivering nutrients into the bloodstream. This technology should be reasonably mature by the 2020s. [...] we will be able to eat whatever we want, whatever gives us pleasure and gastronomic fulfilment [...] We will be able to accomplish this using special elimination nanobots that act like tiny garbage compactors. [...] One might comment that we do obtain some pleasure from the elimination function, but I suspect that most people would be happy to do without it.

RAY KURTZWEIL

To state that we live in strange times does not say much, since all ages must have been, and probably always will be, strange, but maybe this historical moment has a peculiarity of its own. This present time seems to reconcile, as never before, euphoric celebrations of an allegedly triumphant happiness, and profoundly desolating visions of the near future. In so many ways, at the beginning of this second decade of the

