

**Which Reality? Interactions at the southern border of  
Mexico as fieldwork of creative practice.**

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The following text synthetizes and describes the research "Which Reality? Interactions at the Southern Border of México as a fieldwork of creative practice". The premise is that such artistic practice is at the same time, a way to understand and generate knowledge from the diversity of cultural and social manifestations and events in some places of the south frontier of Mexico. The purpose of this project is to think of the borders not only as the geographic limits of countries or national states, but as the symbolic differences between people, emphasizing everything they are not equal above what they have in common. The geopolitical spaces that delimit the territory of a state-nation are the palpable repertoire of the mobility of people, things and events. These practices are carried out in more or less visible ways and demonstrate to exist and have been continuously there. They are different kinds of communication and common actions, in order to obtain wellbeing as well as to raise the quality of life of the people involved.

The project "Which reality?" in its material and visible forms was outlined as a series of in-site interventions, such as public sculpture, art installations, driven participative actions, photo and video, as a result of the interaction in some border cities in the States of Chiapas, Tabasco and Quintana Roo and their borderlines.

The production has followed the following lines of thematic search: A) The borderlines: highways, landscapes, customs, surveillance. B) The people and groups of people that converge in these territories. C) The smuggling of things and the comings and goings of people between the countries or in the inside of the national territory (between cities of the same state, rural immigrants etc.) The selection of the places are significant of the south frontier, both the sculptures and the interventions as well have been built with objects and/or processes that function symbolically for the groups or inhabitants of the area and in collaboration with them: useful objects for the work, processes of transformation of materials, manufacture of crafts techniques, clothes, donations, among others.

This text is articulated around three ideas, which are displayed along the creative project process.

In the first place the projection of an artistic practice that relies on contemporary visual art, on one side, implies an in-site investigation due to the requirement of a specific experience as a site of creation. On the other side, it implies that the creator becomes a researcher who observes and systematizes what he perceives. The creator automatically describes what is captured with video and photo cameras and subsequently intervenes on the day to day of the places he has got involved.

The second idea which goes throughout the whole investigation is that the borders are considered strips where the search for wellbeing inherent to people can be clearly observed. Smuggling and migration have always taken place; the variation is the way that these are performed. These ways are the forms of creation where people's capacity to adapt to the environment becomes visible, as well as, how artificial and arbitrary the institutions that dictate what is legal and what is not legal are.

Finally, this way of artistic practice is what opens, from a specific point of view, the possibility to build the sense of events, phenomenon and manners to do and perceive, and at the same time it transforms the way to build or modify

reality, and with this, the transformation of the artistic practice itself.

### **I. Operative dimensions of the artistic practice:**

#### 1. The specific experience as a methodology.

Experience is supposed to be knowledge turned into practice; this knowledge is put in a day-to-day life basis, and in the empirical aspect of existence, on the contrary to one of an abstract nature. In this sense, Michel Maffesoli, on his text *Eloge de la raison sensible* underlines the necessity of giving away an organic knowledge with roots in the community one deals with as a substratum to a speculative empiricism guided by the immediate, meaning by this, the specific of social phenomenon.

#### 2. The creator as researcher.

The second operative dimension implies the creator as an researcher, who involves directly on certain social and cultural spaces, with different persons, events, facts and phenomenon, with the purpose of emphasizing that no creation is individual but it's the outcome of the subjectivity of the creator, as well as, the community's vast interconnections: family and social interrelations; it comes from mass media communications and from its own social everyday movements.

### 3. The tools as corporal extensions.

Finally, the tools to capture images: photo and video cameras function as corporal extensions that document the experience in an automatic way, in order to describe, more than to create, this is used to build a knowledge never pre-assigned, but to be built, going hand to hand with the transforming ability of the practices, knowing that subjectivity is mutant.

## **II. The border as an artificial line and symbolic division.**

The hatred and exclusion of persons and communities is result of arbitrary divisions that the political organization has built. These are used as an excuse for standardization and the creation of stereotypes. Appealing to cultural relativism have deceived and disseminated physical differences such as the color of the skin, hair, eyes, the concept of gender, the country of birth, nationalist identifications as stigmas. This segregation supports and legitimizes a state of violence, on the other hand, it structures whole communities in a hierarchical manner to dominate and extend power. Therefore, the interest is in the how and why the capitalism defines and criminalizes phenomenon like migration and smuggling. How this is punished

and how much it determines the relationships between the persons inhabiting these areas. The attention points out to this paradox to highlight how these constructions of legality with which these definitions are fixed have political implications, meaning, if there is legality there is illegality.

The territorial boundaries fixed by any countries, function to quantify and define all of what it is supposed to remain permanent and useful to perform this task. Persons are what they should be and live where they should live. On the contrary, persons as well as mobile events are difficult to identify or be defined inside the illegality frame.

### **III. Which Reality? Six visions of the Mexican south border.**

The project "Which Reality?" in its materiality and visibility was thought of as a series of interventions in-site, such as public sculptures, installations, participatory actions, photo and video, starting from the interaction in some border cities of the Mexican states of Chiapas, Tabasco and Quintana Roo and their adjacent countries of Guatemala and Belize. 1. Documents, statements, images. With more or less surveillance the borders are visible spaces of the mobility and transit of persons, animals and things. The

paradox is fixed on this supposed illegal state: actions, which are provoked and at the same time criminalized by the system.

The traffic of people, animals, drugs, weapons, gasoline, and the different ways adopted for this to take place from one borderline to the other are the outcome and consequence of the establishment of ethnic, gender, religious and economic differences which are created and reproduced by the capitalist system and revived by us when we join in.

The sense in which this state of things can be constructed is when there is the possibility to see other sides of the phenomenon and social practices.

a) "Camera that watches the sky" in-site intervention at Suchiate River at the south border of México with Guatemala. The installment of a "surveillance camera" on a raft commonly used to transport persons and things from the border of Ciudad Hidalgo to the border of Tecún Uman and vice versa through an alternate, not official, border crossing between Mexico and Guatemala is one of the actions I constructed during my first stay. The camera is watching nothing; it is turned to the sky in a gesture of "looking the other way".

b) "Surveillance unit: Moto-taxi" Intervention at Free zone on Corozal Bay of Belize. With useless video and photo cameras, bought at an electronics store in the south border area called Zona Libre, various art actions were made. Usually the process of buying and selling many forms of junk is from north to south. In México and Centro America countries it is practiced the smuggling or importation of waste like cardboard, American scrap cars, second hand clothes or used electronics like televisions or computers from USA. In this case it was the opposite actions witch focused on the fact of importation of trash or waste from one country who do it like Belize to another country that also do it, México.

c) "Package" Intervention in the Rio Usumacinta at the south border of Mexico with Guatemala.

On a boat that it is used to go of a side to other in the Usumacinta River in the México and Guatemala border, I put to sail without course a giant package covered with black plastic. The appearances of things change when you have something that needs to be hidden for any reason. The intervention on the Usumacinta River took place in one point that passes through the town of Benemérito de las Americas in the state of Chiapas. This is another point of border between

México and Guatemala where there is no border control or surveillance, the lives of people flowing through the river and this is part of everyday life.

d) "Gasoline Tanks in stick". Intervention at Tenosique de Pino Suárez.

The borders between two countries are the visible spaces of the mobility and transit of people and things. With more or less surveillance, in these spaces coexist daily practices which are paradoxically produced and penalized by the system.

Gasoline smuggling takes place on a daily basis at some spots of the borders of Mexico and Guatemala. It is of interest what people do, and how they do it along the border lines between countries. These practices are an evidence of something that gives some people the possibility of wellbeing.

To think art as a practice, with the procedural implications this may have, demands the manoeuvre of reconsidering the appropriateness on the way of art production and also on the formats of the produced objects and its reflections. To think again implies an adventure, because knowledge is never pre-assigned but it is always to be built; therefore, taking art as a practice would imply to

include the observation of events that have generated them as part of the investigation, meaning by this, have determined it: the final form it has acquired. This is the reason why a documentation describing the experiences that determined the artistic form is included. An "event" is the outcome of what has had a transformation effect (from readings, persons, theories, happenings, images); therefore, events are those experiences that constitute the process of creation itself and the method through which it proceeds.

Creation is not only present in the outcome of the practice or on the material concretions but also, and what is more important, in the process of subjectivity itself allowing to construct a series of experiences that may provoke multiple connections that involve producing different versions of reality.

The search of meaning is always a new start; it does not exist by itself, but has to be constructed and maintains a connection with the transformation, meaning that it is possible the existence of the not thought. The sense not just implies itself, it comprehends the paradox of that not being shown, it outstands a specific exercise that provokes the experience and the event for the projection of this act. Executing this artistic practice suppose the specific

experience and something else, because it is voluntarily provoked, knowing this is the only way make sense.

It is from here that sense can be considered as the action of thinking, not from the idea of reflection but from an exercise that drive us to suspect thinking in a different way is possible. And paradoxically it seems, in an out of normality way.

The sense, therefore, operates in an implicit way and it is a process of constant transformation; the events (happenings, reading, etc.) function as ongoing mutation devices and involve thinking how and why they transform and what they make this significant framework with. A process that unfolds in the specific implies that the experience about to be built is going to make use of the body as an instrument for the action and in the body the fields interact, it means, there is no separation of the senses, the body feels: it laughs, enjoys, suffers; the body thinks and knows, through it the speeches are consumed or not, through it this "think different" can be approached.

All of the above is a movement that implies the departure from a safe territory to take a risk and construct the escape; the transit of a body, a blurred mark that carries in an implicit way to think specifically, in this

case, the creation resides in this action. From here, thinking is not reflecting, thinking is to take action, to act; and the practice is the outcome of the event. From the specific there is no self-place; this is the adventure of thinking.

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