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Global Tijuana: The Seven Ecologies of the Border

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Nearly a century ago, the U.S.-Mexico border zone was a vast swath of uninhabited desert, canyon lands and mountain chains, interrupted by occasional bursts of agriculture. It was fittingly labeled the “land of sunshine, adobe and silence.”¹ But in the short span of the last half- century, the region absorbed millions of newcomers. Today, it is blanketed with burgeoning cities and vast global industrial complexes, one of the fastest growing economic corridors in the Americas. Along the southern edge, the Mexican cities grow spontaneously, frequently with minimal planning. They borrow from the language and culture of their counterparts north of the boundary. In this part of the world, urbanization marches to the beat of the global economy; its landscapes are driven by the triple engines of global assembly, free trade, and the international division of labor.

Globalization discourse has either misrepresented or failed to take notice of this important transnational region. “Global cities” are typically associated with the headquarters of multi-national corporations (New York, London, Tokyo, etc.) or with mega-centers of the third world (Sao Paulo, Shanghai, Mexico City).

International border regions have generally been dismissed as marginal places. At the Mexican border, observers imagine “global” intertwined with drug smuggling, illegal immigration, or violence.

But the global ecology of the twenty-first century border goes far beyond such misconceived stereotypes. Indeed, border ecologies are far more central to our understanding of world city formations than might seem at first glance. The Tijuana/California border zone offers an ideal laboratory for understanding how globalization is shaping a new kind of urbanism.

This new borderland urbanism springs from a simple principle: processes once thought to define urban form are no longer geographically restricted within the boundaries of the nation-state. Globalization means that a set of exogenous forces (foreign investors, transnational workers, etc.) are now brought to bear on the local and regional construction of urban form. What happens when those forces, and the ecologies they create, operate within a floating physical space that literally transcends international boundaries? Here lies the magic of border cities— not only are they defined by distant global processes, but their global character is imprinted in real geographic space. They literally transcend the physical limits of nation-states. Border cities are tangible living spaces that cross national political boundaries. We can call this new global prototype a “transfrontier metropolis.”²

If we are to craft an ecology for a transfrontier metropolis, we must confront the conditions under which the global economy collides with social space in a bi-cultural, first world-third world, high density, rapidly urbanizing international boundary region. We must go beyond the traditional measures of urban ecology, into a world of post-modern ecology. Tijuana challenges our notions of urban form, just as Los Angeles did some thirty years ago. Los Angeles was originally seen as the antithesis of good urban form, a new age, post-industrial sprawling, confused mass of formless ecologies. It took an outsider, a visiting German architect, to jolt urbanists into seeing the possibilities of Los Angeles’ innovative ecology. Los Angeles offered a novel mixing of

physical form and social behavior. The automobile and the freeway provided for a rich ecology of individual expression and optimism imbedded in private, low density, single family residential ecologies (in foothills and lowlands), and in the spiritual luxury of vast open spaces, beach lifestyles and health consciousness.³

Perhaps Los Angeles and the shift toward post-modernity also teach us that urban ecologies are physical and material, yet also conceptual and cognitive.⁴ In a world of global marketing, high technology, instantaneous communication, and rapid-fire cross-border movements, ecologies are not measured merely by physically bounded space, but by the behaviors and perceptions of local and regional actors, responding to the new global reality.

This brings us to Tijuana, a metropolis pulled between the forces of globalization and those of traditional Mexico. Tijuana is a Mexican city, born to a culture whose urbanism is anchored in the indigenous cosmologies of sacred space and nature as well as Spanish grid designs of colonial royal power and urban Catholic order. These foundations have been modified by Latin modernity, fused with 20th century nationalism, and managed under a highly centralized political system where the federal government dictates the form and function of its cities. Yet Tijuana's ecology is also being mediated by many new global and transcultural forces; the city is a conduit and homeland to international migrants, a staging area for the new global factory, and the site for experiments in expanded free trade and cross border consumerism. Taken together these divergent forces have produced one of the great global examples of an urban work- in- progress, a metropolis literally caught between paradigms— modernity and post-modernity, North and South, local and global— a place on the verge of being catapulted beyond, to a new level of innovation, or what has been termed hybridity.⁵

With this in mind, this chapter begins to unravel the landscape of Tijuana's emerging global ecologies. Seven new ecologies form the superstructure of this bustling metropolis of nearly two million people. They include spaces formed by global economic actors (global factory zones,

transnational consumer spaces, and global tourism districts) and spaces that represent regional and local responses to globalizing forces (post-NAFTA neighborhoods, transnational community places, spaces of conflict and invented connections).

- *Global factory zones* consist of vast, sprawling industrial parks with foreign owned assembly plants where color television sets, video players, and other consumer goods are manufactured in cheap labor enclaves, then shipped to markets in the U.S. and other developed nations.
- *Transnational consumer spaces*, include new shopping malls, strip developed corridors, and commercial zones with international chain stores. Their landscapes are homogenized and carefully controlled as part of a global marketing strategy.
- *Global tourism districts* are spaces being invented for international tourism, where the dominant built environment strategy is to craft homogenous, easily recognized cultural landscapes-- luxury resorts or formal tourism districts.
- *Post-NAFTA neighborhoods* include a variety of living spaces directly or indirectly created by the global economy. Transnational elite residential zones, or gated communities, are being designed either for U.S. and other foreign residents, or wealthy Mexican nationals. New elite suburbs are decentralized residential spaces built along the lines of U.S. suburban developments, and immigrant barrios (*colonias*) are the spaces for new migrants to the border region, generally characterized by spontaneously constructed self-help housing and locally engineered community infrastructure needed for survival in a globalizing system.

- *Transnational community places* include nodes and public gathering spaces that transform the international boundary line from a militarized, protected space into a part of the community. They are made possible by the gradual evolution of a more porous border where trade and exchange are valued above defense and security.

- *Spaces of conflict* are symptomatic of the condition of unresolved tension embedded in settlements on the boundary. The national debate-- security vs. open borders —remains embedded in the visual landscape and geography of the immediate boundary zone.

- *Invented connections* are opportunistic forms of urbanism imagined (and built) by entrepreneurs and planners who seek to find profit from the emerging transnational phenomenon.

Global Factory Zones

The “global factory” is one of the great inventions of late 20th century world capitalism. As labor costs impinged on profits among multi-national firms in the 1950’s and 1960’s, the idea of global cheap labor enclaves emerged. Firms discovered they could simply move the factory floor to a less developed nation. Third World countries suddenly loomed as the new industrial labor pools for global industrial giants. Thus was born the global factory.

Mexico quickly became a key player, through the so called "twin plant" or *maquiladora* (assembly plant) project. In the 1960’s, Mexico’s government hatched a new federal office to promote border economic expansion—it was known as PRONAF, the National Frontier Program. The biggest plank in the PRONAF development strategy was reduction of unemployment through industrial growth. In 1965, the Border Industrial Program (BIP) was introduced. It built on the emerging "off shore" production concepts that U.S. manufacturers

had already started in places like Hong Kong or Taiwan. The BIP project envisioned foreign owned (mainly American) factories relocating their labor-intensive assembly operations to the Mexican border.

And relocate they did. The BIP forever changed the Mexican borderlands. In 1970, there were 160 *maquiladoras* in Mexico, employing around 20,000 workers. Some 25 years later, there were an estimated 2,400 assembly plants in Mexico, employing nearly three quarter million workers, with a value-added estimated at roughly three billion dollars. All of these plants are foreign owned; the majority come from the U.S., Japan, South Korea, Canada and Germany.

Maquiladoras brought a dramatic global shift to the Mexican border. They single-handedly legitimated the border region as a place for foreign investment. Asian, European and U.S. investors facilitated the border's rise onto the radar screen of the global economic community. The construction of assembly plant complexes served to anchor the real estate and development boom of the last twentieth century, bringing road, sewerage and other infrastructure to outer lying areas of the cities. *Maquilas* created an alternative labor source for millions of Mexican immigrants heading north. Their multiplier effects in generating linked employment clusters in services further expanded urban growth. The sheer numbers of workers amplified pressure on cities like Tijuana to find ways to absorb new migrants.

The factories themselves descend upon the landscape of Tijuana, consolidating around an ecology of the modern industrial park, not unlike the counterpart U.S. suburban industrial parks to the north. As in the U.S., the dominant feature is the use of uniform lot sizes and street setbacks, as well as controlled landscaping. There are also sophisticated systems of screening and security, as well as large scale parking facilities. The *Ciudad Industrial* (Industrial City) on the eastern Mesa de Otay, is Tijuana's principal global factory zone. Because this *maquila* zone lies on the outskirts of Tijuana, it resembles a kind of suburban *hacienda* compound, an insular space where workers provide labor to the "*patron*" (the industrial giant) in return for a modest salary. However unlike

industrial parks in San Diego, Tijuana's *maquila* parks are surrounded by poor *colonias*, low- income settlements that typically house many of the assembly workers.

Transnational Consumer Spaces

One of the guiding principles of global capitalism has been the "culture- ideology of consumerism". Global corporations use advertising and transnational media not merely to sell their products across the globe, but to promote a style of consumption that becomes part of a standardized global culture.⁶ Examples of consumption that has been globalized include soft drinks (coca cola, etc.) and fast food. Part of the success in marketing these commodities globally can be traced to corporate strategies to homogenize consumer tastes. By constructing globally uniform consumer behavior (through advertising and construction of recognizable images) multinational corporations can better control the marketing of their products.

This global homogenization of consumer taste arguably exists not only in food products, clothing or automobiles, but in the built environment as well. The design of shopping malls, fast food restaurants, hotels, resorts, and other urban spaces has become globalized. There are no longer vast differences between shopping mall designs in China, Ireland, Peru or Mexico. Malls have a standardized site plan and design concept— that includes the use of anchor stores, public areas for walking and sitting, food courts, movie theaters, and restaurants. Further, there is a growing trend in renting space to global chain stores that sell clothing, electronics, and other consumer goods in shopping malls around the world. Hotels and resorts often use standardized designs as well. Indeed, many corporate hotel chains believe that travelers like the predictable, familiar designs of hotel chains in the United States and Western Europe, and thus seek to replicate those designs in other cultural settings. Their marketing

departments will tell you that consumers prefer the familiar images of their hotel, over the less familiar components of local cultures.

These designs are not merely limited to buildings. The new public spaces of the 21st century will be privatized streets, festival marketplaces or giant mall complexes. Increasingly, these consumer spaces seek to replace the traditional downtown as the primary pedestrian-scale gathering place for post-modern city dwellers. The quintessential privatized street is “City Walk,” on the west side of Los Angeles. The architects successfully recreated the scale and the feel of a pedestrian street; for example each store is visually presented as a separate façade, giving the impression of a street lined with individual buildings. City Walk promotes itself as a series of city streets where people can walk and interact. In fact, it is a large private shopping center disguised as a small village of pedestrian spaces, lined with restaurants, clothing boutiques, specialty stores, and movie theaters.

Mexico has embraced the commodified landscape in the NAFTA era. Four decades ago, nationalist and proud Mexico rejected most U.S. commercial enterprises within its borders—there were virtually no McDonalds or Burger Kings, and no U.S. clothing enterprises anywhere in Mexico as late as the 1980’s. But since the signing of NAFTA, Mexico has opened its doors to U.S. and foreign business. Today, hundreds of U.S. chain stores and hotels have swept across the Mexican landscape—from Blockbuster Video, Office Depot, and Sears to Direct TV., Costco, and Walmart. Most of the global hotel chains—including Hilton, Hyatt, and Sheraton—have also exploded onto the Mexican scene.

Along the international border, the dominance of the U.S. culture-ideology of consumerism has been particularly intense. In the early 1990’s, the invasion of fast food outlets in border cities like Tijuana occurred virtually overnight. In the span of one or two years, every major food outlet—McDonald’s, Carl’s Jr., Burger King, Domino’s Pizza, etc.—burst onto the urban landscape. Around the same time, small, medium and large shopping centers began appearing along commercial boulevards and highways. In Tijuana, these mini-malls served to

interrupt the pedestrian scale of the downtown, since buildings were set back from the sidewalk, while parking lots stood in front. U.S.- style mega- shopping malls also sprouted along the border—Tijuana has two regional -sized shopping malls. U.S. and foreign corporate interests have little trouble selling consumption to Tijuana and other border city residents. Most Mexican border city dwellers can use satellite television to receive programming from southern California. An enormous, captive Mexican audience can therefore be reached by advertisers on California channels. Mexican consumers learn how to consume, partly by watching American television. As a result, Mexicans living along the border have proven to be highly motivated customers on the U. S. side. Studies in California, have shown, for example, that Mexican consumers have similar, if not better information and a slightly better understanding than California residents of locations and qualities of stores and products in the San Diego region.⁷

Global Tourism Districts

Tourism development adheres strongly to the principles of the culture-ideology of consumerism. A central premise of tourism design is the manipulation of visitors' experience of place to maximize profit. Global tourism investors and corporate decision makers tend to view regions as stage sets for generating profit, rather than as genuine places whose identity should be protected. Because global developers generally view investments from distant world headquarter cities like New York, Chicago, or San Francisco, they often lose touch with the places their investments are transforming. The main strategy of tourism development is to enhance marketability and client interest through the production of landscapes that satisfy the needs of projected users.⁸ Studies have shown that tourists prefer comfort, reliability, and pleasure, especially in foreign settings. The architecture designed to accommodate visitors, which one writer calls the "tourism gaze," is, in effect, a landscape socially constructed for a targeted population. It has been compared to Foucault's "medical gaze," a

strategy of controlled design aimed at a different economic interest group— consumers of medical services and facilities.⁹

Tourism developers seek to create homogenous, readily distinguished, easily consumed built environment experiences for their client populations. Controlled resort structures with recognizable designs (oceanfront boardwalks, small clustered, shopping and restaurant complexes, hotels, fast food outlets, global boutiques) have become the central pillars of tourism landscape design. The value of tourist space is measured by its marketability for short- term tourism visits, rather than by its cultural uniqueness or environmental purity.

Global tourism reveals the dangers of commodification— the transformation of tourism spaces into generic commodities for sale in the world market. As with product marketing, global companies want to standardize the tourism experience. Large- scale tourism resort developments, based on uniform design criteria, are not crafted with the local environment in mind, which is why they are often not sustainable.¹⁰ The tourism industry, controlled from international command centers in wealthy nations, tends to promote distorted images of Third World nations like Mexico, the main destinations of their clients. Global tourism firms have little interest in portraying nations as they really are. For example, it is almost always the case that poverty is minimized or ignored, as are many local customs and practices.

The distinct marketing strategies of the international tourism industry lead to the production of placeless landscapes, devoid or destructive of culture and nature. If tourism is more profitable in built landscapes that are homogenous, then what incentive can there be for tourism developers to preserve the original landscapes of the places they invest in? Even in ecologically sensitive zones (jungles, mountains, etc.) or culturally preserved spaces (colonial downtowns), the demand for cosmopolitan infrastructure by tourists-- luxury hotels, swimming pools, and plush shopping spaces -- has the effect of diminishing the original cultural landscapes, which become overwhelmed by structures designed for consumption.

In Tijuana, the main commercial street in the old downtown tourism district—Revolution Avenue—is a striking example of a manipulated, commodified space. Revolution Avenue is to Tijuana what Main Street, U.S.A. is to Disneyland—an artificial promenade that sets the mood for a carefully choreographed experience. In Disneyland, the visitor parks his/her car, and walks across the parking lot, through the entrance gates, and onto Main Street, a theatrical stage set, built at 4/5 scale, and lined with costumed characters, from Mickey Mouse to a Barbershop Quartet. In Tijuana, tourists park their cars in vast lots just north of the border, cross the pedestrian entrance into Mexico, and move along a path that leads them into Revolution Avenue.

Revolution Avenue is a mini- theme park—a clever stage set of outrageous color and grotesque facades. Buildings resemble zebras or Moorish castles. Flags and colorful blimps fly overhead. Music blares, whistles blow, barkers shout along its nearly one mile length. The setting is a classic “other directed space,” a vacation-land and consumer haven created for outsiders.¹¹ “Revolution Avenue is theater, ” states one Mexican architect. “You see a life sized yellow school bus on the exterior of a building—it is oriented toward the market of high school age Americans who come to drink. The architecture is fun. It says ‘Now come on your school bus and you can drink.’ It’s all an exercise in border craftsmanship.”¹²

This argument comes full circle. Disneyland is the quintessential “other-directed” landscape, “a world without violence, confrontation, ideological or racial clashes, without politics... a world that is white, Anglo Saxon, and Puritan-Protestant, often redneck, void of ethnic cast.”¹³ One could argue that Revolution Ave. was designed to be an idealized “Mexico-land”, a fantasy exotica of what Americans imagine Mexico to be. Ironically, Tijuana entrepreneurs tried to build a Mexican version of Disneyland—called Mexitlan, a theme park that celebrated Mexico’s architectural history. By the late 1990’s, the border theme park was a ghost town that had gone out of business. Its demise points to an apparent marketing error made by Mexitlan designers. Along the border,

American tourists prefer a landscape of the exotic and the fantastic. For them, the border's magnetism lies in the world of the unknown, the imagined. Mexitlan gave tourists beautifully designed glimpses into Mexico's real architectural history. This kind of serious tourism experience works in central Mexico but not along the border.

Tourism breeds "enclavism," the creation of isolated zones for visitors, buffered from the everyday city, to allow the outsider's fantasy of the place to remain distinct from its reality, which is usually less exotic. Enclavism leads to the creation of artificial tourism districts that become segregated from the city itself. In Tijuana, globalized enclaves include Revolution Avenue, the aforementioned Mexitlan, commercial/entertainment complexes in the River Zone, and beachfront tourism zones.

Along the beachfront, just south of the city proper lies an excellent example of an enclave-- the village of Puerto Popotla, near the town of Rosarito. Popotla was once a small fishing village of less than 100 residents. The Hollywood film company Twentieth Century Fox leased land adjacent to the village to build a major studio-- Fox Baja Studios-- for film production in the mid 1990's. The first film was "Titanic;" its enormous global success has had ripple effects on this zone of Baja California. The Titanic facilities consisted of imposing, massive, ugly gray metal warehouses, and a giant concrete wall surrounding the site, which townspeople have dubbed "the Berlin wall." The film production facilities completely dwarf the fishing village, and evoke the feeling of a prison: security around the site is extremely tight, with high walls and a guardhouse. Here "enclavism" takes an interesting form— a "movie maquiladora," or an assembly plant for film making."¹⁴

More recently, Fox Studios Baja built and opened a new theme park adjacent to its Baja Film studio site. It is called "Foxploration" and is devoted to the art of movie-making. The park includes exhibits of the original "Titanic" set, technology of film making, and the craft of props and accessories.

This enclave has already brought environmental degradation to the Tijuana/Baja coastline. During construction, underwater explosives may have been used to grade the beach area and build several giant pools for the Titanic filming, causing destruction of marine life for kilometers around the site. Further, according to some observers, during filming the company dumped chlorine into the pool, and emptied its tanks in the ocean, allowing the chlorine to seep into the kelp beds and nearby ecology. Privately owned, protected, commodified spaces tend to remain closed off from government code enforcers and housing inspectors.

The irony, as one explores the landscape of Popotla, is that the very company (Fox) that specializes in making spectacular, finely crafted images for movies, houses its activities on the edge of the Pacific Ocean in ugly gray warehouses surrounded by concrete walls and barbed wire fences. The design of the film compound, apparently rushed through without a serious environmental impact study or planning analysis, dwarfs the nearby village of lobster fishermen, modest wooden shacks and restaurants for workers.

Post-NAFTA Neighborhoods

The traditional social geography of Mexican border towns reveals an inverse model of the U.S. pattern. In Mexico, wealthy residents cluster in older established neighborhoods adjacent to downtown, or along a commercial corridor leading out of the central business district. Middle class, working class, and poor neighborhoods are arrayed concentrically around the core, with the poorest residents living farthest from the center.

Globalization exacerbates this social geography; at the same time, it adds new twists to it. The biggest changes are the addition of new residential enclaves for transnational investors and visitors. In Tijuana, the valuable coastline just beyond the city offers comparatively inexpensive real estate for U.S. residents, either in the form of second homes, or permanent dwellings for

retirees. Some 25,000 Americans reside in the coastal corridor between Tijuana and Ensenada, and that number will grow.¹⁵ Global real estate projects are aiming to create golf resorts, beachfront condo complexes and luxury marina housing enclaves for foreign residents. These high paying land users routinely outbid Mexicans for coastal properties; the result is that the social ecology of the coastal strip is global—it is dominated by foreign residents.

Meanwhile, U.S.- style condominiums and suburban housing developments for Mexicans have accelerated across Tijuana. Mexican consumers are familiar with U.S. housing, both from crossing the border, or through the print and visual media. Global advertising has altered their taste in housing. Wealthy consumers want condominiums with jacuzis, sunken bathtubs and satellite television. Even poor migrants aspire to U.S. house-types. A former border architect speaks of his frustration with people who, despite incredibly limited incomes, refuse to live in houses that could be technically designed to fit their budgets. “My clients don’t want to live in a house designed with recycled metal or junk parts, even if it is excellently constructed. They want a California tract house, with a picture window and a garage. A lot of people can’t afford to buy a house in the United States, but they buy the magazines, and then they find a photograph of a house they like. They bring it to the architect in Tijuana, and they say ‘I want a house like this.’ But they forget that in Mexico our lot sizes are smaller and narrower. We don’t have the space to design with ideal lighting and ventilation. To meet their needs, we end up designing caricatures of American-style houses in miniature.”¹⁶

As mentioned earlier, worker housing has been dispersed around the *maquila* zones. Migrants to Tijuana live on the edges of the city, near or beyond the zone of *maquila* workers, in squatter communities of sub-standard housing, also known locally as *colonias populares*. This class of marginal, disenfranchised urban poor may not ultimately benefit greatly from globalization, but they respond to its seductive pull. The struggle of the urban poor to survive

in booming, globalizing cities constitutes a key debate underlying the globalization protest movements around the globe.

Colonias are pockets of haphazardly constructed houses, built by the poor themselves, usually on the worst possible sites in the city—flood-prone canyons, steep sloping hillsides, airports, major highways, or land far removed from the city proper. Many of these settlements were created by illegal land invasions, since the poor do not have liquid capital to pay the cost of a home purchase or even rent. This means that *colonia* residents live in a precarious state—burdened by the dual limitations of inadequate house materials for construction (cardboard, tar paper, scrap wood, scrap metal) and questionable legal ownership. Further, these *colonias* often lack basic services like running water, sewage disposal, paved roads, or street lighting. Most of the households use pirated electricity, stolen from illegal lines connected to nearby electricity grids.

As NAFTA's grip strengthens along the border, more global economic activities—factories, commercial developments, tourism enterprises-- create a higher demand for low paying jobs. This in turn attracts even more migrants from the interior of Mexico. Globalization has exacerbated an already burgeoning migration stream headed north, thus spreading the landscape of squalid shanties across the hills and canyons on the outskirts of Tijuana. In the midst of increasing wealth in certain privileged areas (coastline, downtown, River zone), there is increasing deprivation scattered through the squatter communities in the region.

Transnational community places

While nations continue to militarize borders in some regions of the world, a parallel universe of relatively stable border regions has evolved. On these borders new kinds of transnational community spaces are forming. The creation of community spaces and places near international borders runs counter to nearly two centuries of history, where cities were organized as physical entities

that lie territorially within the boundaries of one sovereign nation. This is no longer the case today. In a number of global boundary zones, most notably Western Europe and North America, we find community spaces that sprawl across international boundaries¹⁷.

The development of a transnational urban ecology is an overlooked dimension of globalization. A century ago, territorial politics dictated that nations meticulously guard their international boundaries. This "shelter function" mentality¹⁸ fostered a common pattern of national settlement: the largest concentrations of urban population tended to locate away from the physical edge of the nation state. In fact, before 1950, boundary regions were mainly viewed as buffer zones that served to defend the larger nation from land-based invasions. Under these conditions, few significant community spaces evolved on or near national boundaries. Indeed important urban settlements did not appear near borders. A quick glance at a map of Western Europe corroborates this point: the great cities of Paris, Madrid, Rome, Vienna, and Frankfurt all lie in the border-less interior of their national settings. Across the Atlantic ocean in the Americas, a similar pattern emerges: Mexico City, Lima (Peru), Sao Paulo (Brazil), and Santiago (Chile) are all positioned at a considerable distance from the nearest international boundary.

Yet today, globalization is opening up border territories to new community formations. Citizens on either side of the Mexico-U.S. boundary are increasingly drawn together; old differences are set aside as urban neighbors become part of a common transnational living and working space. The building blocks of these new transnational communities lie in the social and physical linkages that connect settlements across the boundary. Such linkages in Tijuana-San Diego include the existence of international commuters, transnational consumers, global factories, cross-border land and housing markets and transnational architecture.

Nearly 300,000 workers legally travel across the border, from the Mexican to the US side of a transfrontier metropolis, to work in the United States on a

daily or weekly basis. Countless thousands of others cross illegally with a border resident card (which permits Mexican border residents to cross into the US for non-work purposes, but which is frequently used illegally to get to work). Billions of dollars in cross-border commercial transactions take place annually. Several hundred million border crossings also occur each year, primarily between the partners that form the transnational metropolis. Consumers constitute the most active group of legal border crossers, and are perhaps the primary population that ties together the two sides of the Mexico-US transfrontier metropolis. Collectively they form a complex regional network of flows north and south across the border. The existence of this volume of flows is leading to the emergence of what we might term “transnational citizens,” people who exist on both sides of the border.

The evolution of a community of transnational citizens that have a presence north and south of the border is expressed in the social ecology of the region. Urban dwellers do not merely consume goods, they consume the built environment itself—by purchasing land and housing on both sides of the line. NAFTA has opened the door for purchase or lease of land by global investors along the border, particularly in the Baja California region, where plans for international resorts, hotel complexes, commercial development and luxury housing are abundant. Baja California already has the second largest enclave of expatriate American homeowners (the largest lies in the Guadalajara region), with some 15,000-20,000 Americans residing in homes along the Baja coast. Meanwhile, increasing numbers of Mexican immigrants, as they legitimize their work and immigration status, are purchasing homes on the US side of the border. Some members of a family may live on the US side, while others remain on the Mexican side. The hard edge of political demarcation—the physical boundary line—begins to blur. The larger transfrontier region becomes the true urban life space of the border dweller, a more precise spatial construct for defining the experience of binational urban families.

The border has never really separated the cultural construction of the built environment, but today we are seeing an acceleration in the diffusion of global influences on Tijuana's built environment, and in Mexican influences north of the border. In Tijuana, evidence of US influence on the landscape abounds. Why else would one find a Tudor revival home in an upper class neighborhood of Tijuana, suburban tract homes and condominiums, US style shopping malls, and fast food outlets sprouting everywhere? U.S. influence even appears in the squatter communities, or *colonias*, in the form of recycled materials purchased in the US—such as rubber tires, used lumber, or scrap metal highways signs, an important element in the vernacular architecture of Mexican border cities. In sum, what we are seeing are sets of everyday landscapes—shopping centers, freeways, outdoor markets, commuter lanes—that begin to behave as if the international boundary were invisible.

One of the more vivid examples of transborder community place-making is visible in the strategies employed by border residents in taking back the boundary zone itself. The wall, legally managed by the State, is being physically re-incorporated back into the adjacent communities by users, be they local residents, border crossers, artists, or community political groups. Rather than let the boundary zone continue to be a space of liability, a no-mans land, a zone of insecurity, potential crime and international bureaucracy, local citizens are choosing to humanize the border. Monuments to people who died crossing the boundary have been erected on the border fence itself. The fence is transformed into a public space that can be visited by local residents, a sacred place that commemorates the regional struggle at certain moments in history.

This grassroots place-making seeks to redefine the boundary space, turning a negative (smuggling, illegal immigration, border police forces) into a positive (works of art, monuments and commemoratives that are part of the community). People who live near the fence use it to define their living space—gardens are planted, clothesline may connect to it, telephones are installed for use by the clandestine border crossers. The boundary zone becomes not only a

part of the everyday neighborhood landscape, it is textured into the built landscape of migration, redesigned as a conduit to help those Mexicans who are desperate to cross the frontier and work in the United States. Why not let them make the phone calls to their families north of the border?

Spaces of Conflict

“Si el de Berlin cayo, el de Tijuana porque no?” (If the one in Berlin fell, why not the one in Tijuana?).

-- graffiti on the international boundary fence at Tijuana-San Diego.

For more than a century, Tijuana’s existence was defined by its link to the physical boundary. Tijuana, like so many Mexican border cities, occupied a schizophrenic world, dancing between the reality of its economic ties to the United States, and its nationalist link to Mexico. The physical boundary—the wall, the fence—stood as a constant reminder of this double identity.

Today, globalization along the border evokes a critical debate —does the region’s future lie with perpetuation of the wall, and all that it symbolizes— national security, sovereignty, defense, and militarization, -- or does it reside in the propagation of a world of transparent boundaries and trans-frontier cities? This theme shapes an underlying tension embedded in the built environment of border cities, a tension that is manifest by the conflicted landscapes of the immediate boundary zone where the two nations meet.

The popular global icon of militarized boundaries is the Berlin wall – a landscape of bleak, gray images of barbed wire, concrete barriers, soldiers in watch towers peering through binoculars, and bodies of failed border- crossers draped across the no man’s land between East and West. The German wall, before its destruction, ran 66 miles in twelve- foot high concrete block, 35 miles in wire and mesh fencing. It had over two hundred watch- towers, and blinding yellow night lights mounted on tall poles.

The Tijuana-San Diego “wall” is forty- seven miles long, and built from corrugated metal landing mats recycled from the Persian Gulf War. Migrants have punched it full of holes, so a second parallel wall is under construction a few hundred feet north. The new wall includes 18- foot high concrete “bollard” pilings topped with tilted metal mesh screens, and an experimental cantilevered wire mesh style fence being developed by Sandia Labs. The fence/wall runs toward the Pacific Ocean, where it becomes a ziggurat of eight, six and four – foot- high metal tube fence knifing into the sea. It is buttressed by six miles of stadium night- lights, 1200 seismic sensors and numerous infra red sensors used to detect the movement of people after dark.

Like the Berlin wall, landscapes along the Tijuana boundary explode with messages of danger and conflict. These images tend to reduce the border to a cliché, a war zone, a place controlled by national governments and their police forces. Signage on fences and along the line reinforces an underlying theme-- that only the governments can decide who enters and who crosses. The U.S. government’s “Operation Gatekeeper,” a strategic 1994 plan launched by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Services, is perhaps the most blatant example of a national policy determined to “Berlinize” the California.-Mexico border. Indeed, one official claimed that the goals of the operation were to “restore the rule of law to the California-Baja California border.”¹⁹ This general theme of “militarization” along the border, has remained as part of the landscape, always threatening to move to the forefront each time a crisis looms. The September 11, 2001 terrorist event in the U.S. had the immediate effect of resurrecting the policing, enforcement-oriented functions of the international border.

But this landscape cannot hold. It bumps up against the resounding voice of a great global acronym—NAFTA. Mexican and U.S. presidents publicly celebrate globalization, and the goal of a less restrictive boundary. But, stand among the hordes of migrants who have just arrived at the border’s great immigrant reception hall, the *Central Camionera*, Tijuana’s main bus station.

Workers from central and southern Mexico arrive here by the thousands each month, and most are still trying to sneak across this border illegally. They crowd onto city buses for the short ride up the plateau through one of the border's largest and booming global factory districts-- Mesa de Otay-- finally arriving at the international boundary line. There, they await darkness, and a *coyote* (smuggler) to guide them across the heavily guarded frontier. The barriers they face remain decidedly Berlinesque. The multi-billion dollar U.S. border security system in place here is a product of over a century of U.S.-Mexican immigration and drug smuggling policy. Meanwhile the governments on either side of this line speak glowingly of NAFTA, and the billions of dollars it will bring. The two nations can't move fast enough to build more freeways, ports, airports, rail systems, and improved border gates-- launch pads for the free trade future.

In San Diego-Tijuana, five million inhabitants share an economy with six billion dollars of annual exports and eight billion in cross-border trade. Tourism is booming. Billions will be invested in mega- resorts, luxury marinas, and vacation homes along the coast of nearby Baja California. Some one thousand international assembly plants employing a quarter million workers will be here by 2010. This could be the next Hong Kong. Yet, to poor immigrants huddling at the taco stands along the boundary fence, these dreams lie thousands of miles away in the national capitals. Here on the edge of Mexico, every night, as the sun sets, Border Patrol helicopters emerge, like mosquitoes, buzzing the skies above and beaming laser spotlights down into the canyons and migrant footpaths. The wall lives.

Invented Connections

The image of the border as a place of violence and chaos has, for many decades, acted as a built- in form of redlining. Border uncertainty and risk depressed the value of land around the line for most investors. As a result, many boundary zones attract only low rent land uses, such as warehouse storage facilities,

parking lots, or currency exchange houses. Properties frequently remain vacant or abandoned, while landowners wait to see what governments have planned for the future. This risk traditionally created a vacuum for investors; yet it also opened the window for those willing to gamble that NAFTA might ultimately transform the boundary zone into a place to do business.

Such is the case along the Tijuana boundary where it bumps up against the town of San Ysidro, California. Tijuana/San Ysidro is the most heavily traveled border crossing in the western hemisphere; its adjacent border crossing space has languished as an underutilized sub-area. It is complicated by the security precautions of the U.S. government, and the problems of smuggling and illegal Mexican migration that cause the border to be preserved as a kind of buffer zone between the two nations.

The San Ysidro-Tijuana port of entry/ border zone is the single largest bi-national connector along the U.S.-Mexico border. Thirty four million vehicles and over seven million pedestrians cross through this gate each year. But the port of entry and surrounding zone on both sides of the border are fragmented by a variety of land use and design problems-- from traffic congestion, poor circulation routes, and disorganized land uses, to crime, public safety concerns, and unresolved land development plans. This vital physical space, the anchor for the region's cross-border economic development, needs to be carefully planned and redeveloped in the next decade.

In a globalizing world, the border zone may no longer be able to function purely as a "pass through" space. It is becoming a connector for the regional economy, and even an important destination in its own right. Thousands of transnational citizens utilize this space each day. Trade and tourism flourish here. The border town of San Ysidro has a population of some 20,000 inhabitants, about ninety percent of whom are of Mexican origin. Downtown Tijuana lies a few hundred yards further south of the line, and houses over 100,000 inhabitants within a radius of one mile of the border.

If there is one single characteristic of the Tijuana/San Ysidro crossing zone today it might be termed a crisis of image. Speaking of this border crossing, one San Diego city council member stated: "Few would disagree that its iron bars, concrete walls and blighted surroundings are an unsightly disgrace to our regional dignity."²⁰ A member of the Planning Commission in the late 1990's commented, "The border entrance is a very seedy kind of place. There is no elegance to it. When you cross the border into Mexico, you feel like you are going into a second rate place. And it really shouldn't be."²¹

This zone is ripe for an "invented connection", a new ecological space created when global investors or entrepreneurs seek to alter the built environment. Large- scale privately funded development projects at boundary crossings are in various stages of completion along the entire two thousand- mile boundary. These projects envision a number of different types of developments, mostly mixed use, and medium density. A prominent feature is that they are mainly privatized spaces, with partnerships maintained with relevant public border monitoring agencies.

On the San Diego-Tijuana border, adjacent to the San Ysidro crossing, a private firm purchased large tracts of land, and with the Redevelopment Authority of the City of San Diego government, put together a new, large- scale project called "Las Americas." Their initial idea was to create a complex of mixed uses, a public plaza, a landmark pedestrian bridged linked to a new pedestrian crossing, a World Trade Center, a market facility, and links to the existing trolley, as well as across the border to Revolution Ave.²² The investment plan imagines a new future for Mexico's boundary--an integration of pedestrian walkways, gardens, and plazas with private retail, entertainment, hotel and office buildings. What is novel about this vision is its recognition of the boundary itself, as a space of community life, rather than a space of instability, conflict, and smuggling. Of course, it also signals the discovery of the potential revenues to be gained by private sector interests in allowing the border to become a privatized place.

This “invented connection” would transform the zone at Tijuana/San Ysidro into a destination, where more tourists and local residents would simply come to the border, and not necessarily even cross it. To the north, San Ysidro, and the surrounding “south bay” region, would become a surrogate for a “Mexican”/border cultural experience, where consumers would feel comfortable coming to the border, without having to deal with the perceived inconveniences of crossing into Tijuana. If pedestrian bridges and other new infrastructure make it easier to cross back and forth into Tijuana, the invented “border urban village” would benefit the economies of both sides.

Phase One of the Las Americas project—a pedestrian-oriented outdoor shopping mall, was inaugurated in December, 2001. The mall is designed as a network of walk-able streets. The larger vision is to build a pedestrian bridge from the mall across the border and into downtown Tijuana’s lower Revolution Avenue sector. This would establish permanent flows of pedestrians from Mexico crossing lower Revolution to shop in San Diego, and from U.S. tourists and citizens moving from the shopping mall into downtown Tijuana.

Conclusion

The spatial form of global Tijuana is that of an urban region that sprawls across an international boundary. Within this “transfrontier metropolis, ” a new global landscape is taking shape. It can be disaggregated into seven ecologies, each one a reflection of the many global processes that are redefining the Mexico-U.S. border, and the cities that reside along it.

Global actors—investors, developers, real estate corporations, business interests, local governments—all seek to remake Tijuana, to prepare it for the global economy of the future. Hundreds of millions of dollars are being spent to build cross-border infrastructure-- ports, highways, mass transit, border crossings-- to better connect Tijuana to the economy north of the border. Global

employment centers—factories, shopping malls, tourism projects, housing developments, and commercial enterprises-- are further reconfiguring Tijuana.

The result of all this restructuring is the production of a new global cultural landscape. The new social ecology includes innovative building strategies and architectures, and new kinds of gathering zones, public spaces, community niches, and business districts. Perhaps most notable, there is evidence of enormous contradiction in this landscape: a conflicted transition zone at the boundary line, as opposed to the optimism of the transfrontier NAFTA community; chaos at the Tijuana/San Ysidro border gate, juxtaposed against the promise of a new Las Americas cross-border commercial project; a pedestrian scale in the old downtown vs. suburban, car-oriented shopping centers; American-style condo complexes and wealthy suburban enclaves, as against the tar paper shacks and dusty streetscapes of the poor *colonias*. In the end, the global landscape is one of contrast and contradiction—between rich and poor, investment and disinvestment, labor and capital, modernity and post-modernity, planning and spontaneity.

What lies ahead? At least two contrasting futures face Tijuana. On one side, the momentum of NAFTA endures—and will be buttressed by the establishment of more democratic elections in Mexico, and more global interest in the economic opportunities native to the Mexico-U.S. cross-border region. On the other hand, global security concerns in the aftermath of 9/11 will continue to shape formal policies of enforcement at the boundary. This seeming contradiction between cross-border economic integration and strict border enforcement is a thorny knot that will continue to tear at the fabric of border urban ecology.

Global equity must also be addressed as a long- term problem for this region. NAFTA participants must learn how to resolve the contradictions manifest by the unequal social landscape of border cities, like Tijuana. The equity component of the NAFTA must be brought out in the open and addressed. If this can be done, the cultural landscape of border towns like Tijuana might be saved.

If not, the old stereotypes of the border will live on in a new form—"the global badlands."

Photographs

By Lawrence A. Herzog

1. The arrival of hundreds of global factories form the core of a dramatic late 20th century transformation in Tijuana's ecology, Panasonic/Matsushita *maquila* assembly plant façade, Mesa de Otay, Tijuana.
2. Homogenous consumer images bombard the automobile traveler in Tijuana's sleek new River Zone commercial district, Blockbuster and Carl's Jr. signs, Tijuana.
3. Mexican tourism entrepreneurs attempt at a hybrid tourism theme park fails to capture the U.S. market, Mexitlan sign, downtown Tijuana.
4. One of the principal post-NAFTA neighborhood ecologies is the formation of ex-urban squatter communities where many assembly plant workers live: pirated electric lines enter, *Colonia Pegaso*, eastern Tijuana
5. Residents near the boundary are taking back the zones near the fence by creating public spaces that commemorate those who died trying to cross, crosses on border fence near Tijuana airport, eastern Tijuana.
6. The border fence continues to embody a landscape of conflict along the line, fence at Playas de Tijuana enters the Pacific Ocean at the border's western terminus.
7. The border's ecology continues to be refined by "invented connections." The creation of a border village at San Ysidro will provide the first direct pedestrian link into downtown Tijuana, enhancing business along Revolution Avenue. FX Club disco, Revolution Avenue, Tijuana.

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- ¹ Charles Lummis, *Land of Poco Tiempo* (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1925).
- ² This concept is developed in two of my prior books: Lawrence A. Herzog, *From Aztec to High Tech: Architecture and Landscape Across the Mexico-United States Border*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), and Lawrence A. Herzog, *Where North Meets South: Cities, Space and Politics On the U.S.-Mexico Border*, Austin: University of Texas Press/CMAS, 1990).
- ³ Reyner Banham, Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies. London: Penguin, 1971.
- ⁴ Jonathan Raban, *Soft City*. New York, E.P.Dutton, 1974
- ⁵ See for example discussions of hybridity in Gustavo Leclerc, Raul Villa and Michael J. Dear, *Urban Latino Cultures Los Angeles*: Sage, 1999; and also in Michael Dear, *The Post-modern Urban Condition*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2001, pp.166-175.
- ⁶ Leslie Sklair, *Sociology of the Global System*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).
- ⁷ See Lawrence Herzog, *From Aztec to High Tech*.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ John Urry. *The Tourist Gaze*. (London: Sage, 1990).
- ¹⁰ Proponents of sustainable development point out that "bioregionalism"-- the relationship between settlement formation and nature-- must be one of the anchors of economic growth See, for example, Devon Pena, *The Terror of the Machine* (Austin: Center for Mexican American Studies, 1997).
- ¹¹ J.B. Jackson, "Other Directed Houses," in Ervin Zube, *Landscapes: The Selected Writings of J.B. Jackson*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970).
- ¹² Arq. Jorge Ozorno, cited in Lawrence Herzog, *From Aztec to High Tech*: 208.
- ¹³ Edward Relph. *Place and Placelessness*. (London: Pion, 1976): 95.
- ¹⁴ This idea is explored in the documentary "Factory of Dreams," produced by Paul Espinosa, KPBS- TV, San Diego, 1999.
- ¹⁵ Mexican property law does not allow foreigners to own land; however post-NAFTA legislation makes it possible for foreigners to lease land through a trust or *fideicomiso* arrangement for up to 60 years.
- ¹⁶ Jorge Ozorno, cited in Lawrence Herzog, *From Aztec to High Tech*: 206.
- ¹⁷ Important European transfrontier urban agglomerations, with populations ranging between 300,000 and one million inhabitants, include Basel-Mulhouse-Freiburg (Swiss-French-German border); Maastricht-Aachen-Liege (Dutch-German-Belgian border); the Geneva metropolitan area (Swiss-French border) and the Strasbourg metropolitan area (French-German border). In North America, one finds transfrontier urban regions housing between 250,000 and four million people along the Canadian-US border at Vancouver-Victoria-Seattle, Detroit-Windsor and Toronto-Hamilton-Buffalo, and on the Mexico-US border at Tijuana-San Diego, Ciudad Juarez-El Paso, Mexicali-Calexico/El Centro, Nuevo Laredo-Laredo, Reynosa-McAllen and Matamoros-Brownsville.
- ¹⁸ The notion of "shelter function" is defined in Jean Gottman, *The Significance of Territory*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1973).
- ¹⁹ Alan D. Bersin, U.S. Attorney, San Diego, cited in Joseph Nevins "The Law of the Land: Local-National Dialectic and the Making of the United States-Mexico Boundary in Southern California," *Historical Geography*, Vol.28, 2000: 41-60.
- ²⁰ Juan Vargas, "A Link, Not a Barrier, at the Border," *San Diego Union Tribune*, Opinion essay. January 10, 1999.
- ²¹ Mark Steele, cited in Lawrence Herzog, "A New Tijuana Needs a New Image," Opinion essay, *San Diego Union Tribune*, March 1, 1998, G-4.
- ²² Land Grant Development, *International Gateway of the Americas*, Project Proposal. (San Diego, 1997).

