

VIDEO NETWORKS

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VIDEO AND CULTURAL ACTIVISM: Ulysses Jenkins, Berta Jottar and Lori Zippay
Also in this issue: *THE 1992 NATIONAL VIDEO FESTIVAL DIRECTORY*

Bay

Area

Video

Coalition

Works en Progress: Intervenciones Across d' Line

By Berta Jottar

THE YEAR OF KWOW-TAY-MOHK!

Mexico City, August 1988.

Mexican presidential elections. demonstration against the fraudulent elections.



Berta Jottar is a video artist from Mexico City who has been living and working between Tijuana and San Diego for the last five years.

Tijuana, Baja California, August 1988.

Calle segunda y Constitution. First street event organized by women artists and activists denouncing the presidential electoral fraud, the case of the vanishing ballots. "Las actas Ya!!!!"



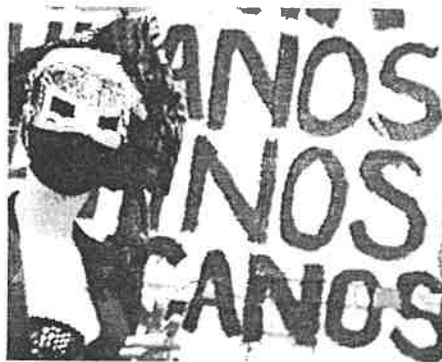
THIS IS NOT A DOCUMENTARY. It will neither look nor act like a documentary. It is a fiction, like all truth. I wish to produce a paragraph of an unwritten history. The video is organized around seven women working and living in the San Diego/Tijuana "clicka," barrio and community--the border. The video documents their contribution to the bicultural and bilingual construction of art and politics in the region. The documentation of their daily, multifaceted interaction reflects the dialectics

of border art. These women's different diasporic and migratory backgrounds, from DF, Mexico City to Tijuana via San Diego or L.A. crystalize the dialogue taking or not taking place within and at the edges of the official "border," or, in other words, the concrete building called "Garita Internacional," the metal wall by colonia Coahuila (el bordo), or the nonexistent fence by colonia Libertad, or the border trying to survive the ocean's objection; finally, the chicken-wire fence by a nameless hill. The border is the scenario where their actions draw different political directions and new maps--a site to begin documented/undocumented, west-other.

The use of these women's artistic/political/interventionist past is a device--something to instigate a discussion--about their present tense, their "location" as woman on the border, and their need to deconstruct, "cruise," and travel within the political, economic, and subjective borders of San Diego/Tijuana, California/Baja California, Mexico/U.S. The video asks: how are gender politics and art negotiated within or through the use of "borderistic" discourses and hybrid aesthetics? How are unequal, exploitive, and "territorial" relationships transformed through art and activism in public spaces?

The video is like an act of running through the back of the "happenings," the scene, and scenarios. It "unveils" the camera, computer, sewing machine, el sarten, and driving-wheel operator. There is not time to show those who have been in front of the camera--the documented. This piece is dedicated to those behind the camera--the undocumented.

The video is not *the* representation of the border since each participant and spectator draws this line in the sand for themselves. The video is a bridge from where the spectator can see, jump, or enter into a dialogue with their own outside.



LA MARQUEZA



NOTE: The video has a special "reportera" and a "camera persona" who directs the project. La Marqueza, the reportera, is a character conceptualized for a previous performance by one of the women. In this piece, La Marqueza takes a new role as the adventurous, opinionated reporter unafraid to reveal her own contradictions. She is meant to be a catalyst to function as both filter and obstacle. Hopefully, her fate will be Brechtian (identification overlaid not with distance but with difference and obnoxious opinions).

FIRST CHARACTER

She is a political activist, member of the leftist party in Tijuana. Works with women in the maquiladora industry and for their rights as workers, particularly for health benefits. Although she is first generation Tijuanaense, she has never obtained la mica to cross. She feels close enough to the States, and if she has a strong need to go, she knows she would be able to cross.

FOURTH CHARACTER

La Marqueza is a masked woman who, rumor has it, is doing research on the contemporary Chicanas' movement. Other than that, I don't know what she does. She habitually appears at any conference vaguely related to Mexicanos y Chicanas. I met her once at one of those conferences--one about borders. We were in solidarity about something not discussed at the conference, the possibility of a "border feminist discourse." La Marqueza and I do not agree on everything but we came to accord on her being the reporter for this project.

CHARACTER SEIS

Second-generation Tijuanaense/Mexicana. She is a single mother, reads Latin, teaches literature, writes poetry, and sings the blues. Recently, she began to sing boleros in Spanglish.

SCENE, THE POET RAPS HER POEM A CAPELLA:

AUDIO

Poem is recited over wind in the background

As poem progresses it becomes increasingly obscured by the roar of the wind and passing cars.

VIDEO

NIGHT SHOT:

(She is lit by one spotlight.)

(She stands at the top of a ladder resting on the fence.)

She is trying to unravel a segment of the already opened wire at the top of the fence.

Slow dolly back until her image reduces in the frame.

Tijuana, April 1990.

"Memorial for the Undocumented." This ceremony took place at "El Bordo." A series of crosses, each one with the names of migrants who died in their journey north or were killed by Immigration and Naturalization Service agents. The crosses were hammered in the ground on the Tijuana side of the fence by the organizers, friends, and future migrants. At sunset, after the audience's testimonies, a series of candles were lit for the people "gone" and for the ones on their way.



SOMOS UN PUEBLO, SIN FRONTERAS!! SOMOS UN PUEBLO, SIN FRONTERAS!!



JP

Tijuana, March 1989.

Super Barrio, leader of Mexico's City Barrio's Assembly, hero of the poor and homeless, protector of the "undocumented worker," visits Tijuana in his national tour protesting the Presidential electoral fraud. The women's group, in collaboration with PRD, PRT, Black Market and more, organized and welcomed al Super at La Plaza Santa Cecilia.

ENLIGHTENING NOTE: Tijuana is a bright city. Its most highlighted section is la avenida Revolution, a tapestry of ads in acid and pastel neon colors. Flashing lights from discos and police cars crisscross bodies walking by. Descending deeper into the local scene, the public buses carry their own interior lighting, sometimes flashing, reds and purples, coming from the adaptable Nivea crystal containers. But, if the local effort to maintain the city as a twenty-first century illuminated manuscript is not enough, Tijuana supplements its lighting with its neighbors' lighting system pointing south. Along El Bordo, next to Colonia Cuahuitlan, where the fence is not a fence but a steel wall, hundreds of halogens illuminate the hard boundary so that nobody passes without being momentarily blinded. Now El Bordo is no longer known by locals as such but as "El Estadio." You know the Mexican humor, both caustic and self-deprecating—truly the mark of a sophisticated culture. "El Pollo" for the undocumented; "Coyote" for those who help them cross; "Estadio" for the haloed place where they cross north. If this is not spectacular enough, "Los Moscos," the INS helicopters (mosquitoes), amaze us with their directional flights and sound show over the houses and Canon Zapata/Soccer Field in Colonia Libertad.

SCENE WITH CHARACTER ONE:

I decided to meet her at the "Border State Park," El Parque de la Amistad, where the border ends, at the edge of the Pacific Ocean. She has no papers to cross to the States. We meet on Sunday because this is when the families who have become separated by the border get together. The families who have no papers to cross north get together with their families who can't cross back south because they are under the amnesty law. Every time we have met here, at the end of the line, we buy some "imported" sweet corn. During the week, the corn man usually sells his produce to la migra through a hole in the fence. (When they show up) on Sundays his clients change. They are the families at the beach and the many low riders (and their girl friends) who cruise en la avenida Ensenada of Playas de Tijuana.

I am an activist, but most of my friends are artists. In Mexico to be an artist is most of the times a sideways activity of daily life. Just a few can afford it. Here at this border, the community of artists and activists is small, so we like changing positions sometimes. I help them in the art events, they help me with the political rallies. Both areas complement each other. Our geographical context exposes and forces us to not only use Mexican art styles, but more local ones like Chicano art in combination with hybrid images and languages like "Spanglish." Hybridity and change constitute the border geopolitical and cultural experience.

Here at the border, Chicano art and border art mirror each other; but I don't see them as equal. Border art has the flexibility to include the non-Mexican Latinos. It can expand and embrace relations from south to further south, Tijuana/San Diego, Mexico City/Tijuana, down to the Central American's refugee's reality in Mexico via the border. I feel closer to the experience of the undocumented before and during their journey north than to the Chicanos' experience in the States. But I feel an equal solidarity for the two. So, I see that border art expands through its travels. We learn and use Chicano art. It teaches us about their struggle as "others" from "that" within; we learn from Mexican art how to use public spaces to talk about our internal and national affairs, and we learn and do border art to combine, translate, and deconstruct our "national discourse" in relationship to the international. Although border art began with a local and regional emphasis, its value to us has been devalued, especially after the Hispanic boom. It has been abstracted, become a model, an international road sign, used to give a postmodern take on other borders, for instance, the destruction of the Berlin wall. Border art began its travels as an inspiration, and now we risk having it returned

SCENE WITH CHARACTER SEIS:

LOCATION: Corner of Fifth and Revolution Avenue. After a walk by "la Revo," the reporter, La Marqueza, and character six decide to get a snack at the corner hot-dog stand. While the dogs fry with grease coming from a strip of bacon around them, the little cart's owner chops tomato, onion, and pickles. He is getting ready to serve his hot dogs... Character seis: "I come to avenida Revolution, maybe once every three months. That is enough for me. I don't negate the extravagance of the street, the complex combination between punks, Tijuanaenses, heavy mierdas, cholillas, los eternos marines, las barbies gringas y Tijuanaenses, some low riders, all walking to the rhythm of the synchronized bass beat from the "neon-deco" discos. I guess the spectacle is interesting as an anthropological study, but if you give it a second look, you see that the city is being trashed, abused, and vomited on by those drunk turistas. It isn't fun. It's not easy to stand around it without making an intervention, without getting into a fight with any gringo who pushes a child selling flowers or pretends, in his underdeveloped monolingualism, not to have understood the price of the silver chain sold by the stooping Mixteca mother. I just want to spit, not on the sidewalks as they do, but on their faces."

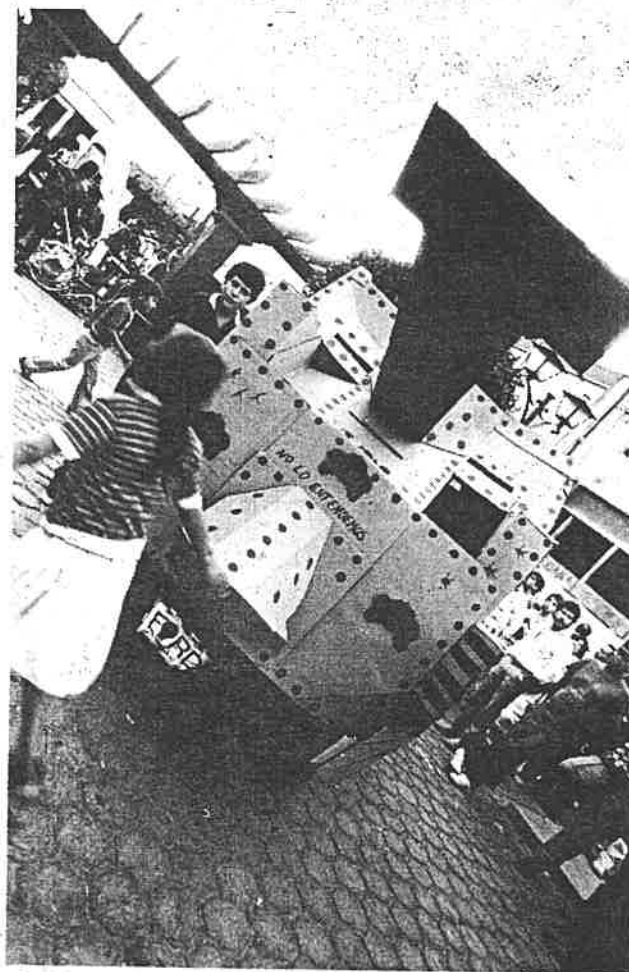
THIRD CHARACTER

A journalist, single mother, border citizen. She is the matriarch of the artists who organized the "street events," especially the ones living in an artists' complex in downtown Tijuana. "El jardín de las delicias," we call it. She says she is not a feminist because to be a feminist in Mexico implies one's "Gringification" or being a man hater, and she says, "Of course, I might be sarcastic but that's about it!"



CHARACTER CINCO

A photographer, she has captured every event organized by los artistas y activistas políticos de las frontera. Although she has learned to charge for her images, her name has mostly been a credit, a "thanks," and a footnote. It doesn't matter, she doesn't have to be in front of the camera in order to control, capture, frame, and make the stories she wants. (That's what she claims.) Anyway, she is not very talkative and thinks her images will speak for her.



Tijuana, October 1988.

Plaza Santa Cecilia. Commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of "La Noche de Tlatelolco." Tlatelolco's student massacre by the Mexican army.



CHARACTER DOS

La Wrestler's bride. The last time that she was seen was crossing the border, causing a scene, refusing la migra's efforts to remove her wrestling mask.

Please, if anybody has seen or heard from her, contact me! She is needed for this project. (I will reward with un credito especial in the video.)

Works en Progress, continued

SCENE AT "EL BORDO"

At a segment of the wall, once a fence, where the Tijuana river makes its way to the bay, a group of women artists, activists, and journalists get together to write on the wall the "rights" that undocumented workers have once they cross to "el otro lado"—the other side. The act has to be done clandestinely, so they split into couples along the fence, protected by the darkness of the night and, more importantly, by the stupidity of la migra.



MUSIC NOTE: Tijuana is a city of sounds and rhythms, which has inspired Los Tigres del Norte and La Maldita Vecindad in Mexico City. Music floats in the streets' atmosphere, from Revolucion to la Coahuila, from the municipal market, to the border beach where madrugadores have their early breakfasts on Sundays, and to the international San Ysidro border crossing which is musicalized at "corrida tempo" by fully equipped macho pick-up trucks.

Tijuana, February 1991.

Clothes' Border Line. A hundred clothes with simulated gun shots were hung on the border fence at Colonia Libertad as a binational protest against the U.S. intervention in Iraq, the Gulf War. After a rally at San Ysidro's park and Tijuana's downtown, the two groups of protestors marched, on their respective sides of the border, until they met at the Clothes' Border Line where they gave a "binational" press conference.

Dear Berta:

Que paso, what's up? I was just having breakfast with our friend [character five] by the cathedral market. She mentioned briefly the project you will be working on. Being a friend of (almost) all you guys, I am quite shocked! What's that in your project of "woman only"? I didn't know you were "FEMINISTS." In fact, I know most of you aren't! I know you all. Most of you don't want to be called that. After all, what projects are you talking about? Most of them were organized by men and women. Even though you were the majority, I also did shitty jobs! I feel excluded. Hey! I always helped you. How come you are doing this to the man? You know we never get enough credit! Honestly, I think your project is quite divisive.

Your camarada.....