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Tijuana Calling



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Article by
Maria Victoria Guglietti (8/9/06)
About
project **Tijuana Calling** 8/9/06 by **inSite_05**



VIEW PROJECT

Tijuana Calling: an exercise on virtual coyote tactics

"I carry the border with me, and I find new borders wherever I go"[1]

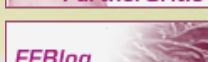
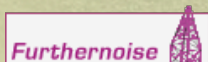
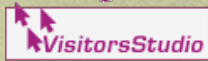
An insight into border-crossing in a borderless space, **Tijuana Calling** is an on-line exhibition that features five commissioned projects by artists living on both sides of the border Mexico-U.S. Presented in October 2005, the exhibition is one of the "scenarios" of inSite_05, a network of art practices that explore the cultural and sociological nature of the Tijuana-San Diego borderland.

Curator **Mark Tribe**, founder of **Rhizome.org** and the man behind **Tijuana Calling**, defines the net-based works as "playful disruptions"? that address urgent issues such as migration flows, cultural translation, surveillance and hybridity[2]. Indeed, the common thread that connects **Turista Fronterizo (Ricardo Dominguez and Coco Fusco)**, **Tj Cybercholos (Fran Illich)**, **LowDrone (Angel Nevarez and Alex Rivera)**, **Corridos (Anne-Marie Schleiner and Luis Hernandez)** and **DENTIMUNDO (Ricardo Miranda Zuatiga)** is the commitment to pollute cyberspace through an intermittent translation of the borderland experience.

Beyond Celebration

In 'The Free Trade Art Agreement'/'El Tratado de Libre Cultura', **Guillermo Gasmuez Peata** denounces the uncritical celebration of border-crossing by members of what he calls the "global transculture"[3]. To resist the depoliticized -or silently politicized- fascination with liminality, while counteracting the oppositional politics of neo-nationalist groups, **Gasmuez Peata** proposes border-crossing as both tactic and cultural translation. The borderland artist becomes, then, an intellectual coyote, a smuggler of cultural practices whose goal is to contaminate, interrupt and confuse the "translucent" waters of the global transculture. It is this border-coyote tactics that pervade **Tijuana Calling**.

In **Turista Fronterizo**, one of the three on-line games featured, border-crossing becomes a matter of hazard and survival. Presented as "a virtual journey through the San Diego-Tijuana borderlands"[4], the work is organized as an on-line monopoly. However, the difference between the on-line version and the original board game is that in **Turista Fronterizo** participants are invited to cross the border in the shoes of either Mexican or American avatars. However, in open



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defiance of the virtual myth of identity play, these avatars are conditioned by their ethnic, economic and political realities.

Also on a playful vein is **LowDrone: The Transnational Hopper**, an on-line game that simulates the crossing of the San-Diego/Tijuana border in an "unmanned airborne lowrider".[5] The LowDrone, a gold 37' Ford mounted on a velvet pedestal and equipped with wings and chrome plated turbines, takes off from Tijuana and attempts the crossing of the border at low height. The game consists in a simulacrum of the failed flight, accompanied by radio updates of new methods of border patrolling. As in Turista Fronterizo, there is little that can be done to change the fate of the border-crossing enterprise.

The third of the on-line games featured, **Corridos**, proposes a drive along a tunnel connecting downtown Tijuana and the San Ysidro mall in San Diego. The game, inspired in the narcotunnels discovered in both **Mexico** and the **U.S.**, invites participants to experience the illegal exchange of humans and goods for which the San Diego-Tijuana border is famous. The recreation of the sites is based on actual plans of the area translated into digital form.

On-line games are not the only form of "playful disruption" imagined by the artists participating in **Tijuana Calling. Tj Cybercholos**, for example, is a project of tactical literature and exercise in cyberzapatismo. In **Tj Cybercholos**, Mexican artist **Fran Illich** created a space for the hypertextual narration of border experiences. The original work has developed into an autonomous server, Possible Worlds, whose goal is to webhost artistic, social and political projects under the Zapatista motto of cooperative and autonomous land use.

Finally, **DENTIMUNDO: Dentistas en la Frontera/Dentists on the Border Mexico/U.S.A** is a website about border dentistry. According to the site, there are 3500 dentists in Tijuana waiting to take care of American "tourists" in search of dental treatment. In an ironic reference to Doctors Without Borders, **DENTIMUNDO** provides visitors with an updated medical directory, travel tips and the possibility of downloading "**Corrido al Dentista**", a corrido song that humorously comments on an often silenced aspect of the Tijuana-San Diego border crossing.

Virtual Coyotes

According to **Gasmez Peata**, the intellectual coyote oscillates between "nomadic chronicler", "intercultural translator" and "political trickster"[6]. This continuous metamorphosis allows the intellectual coyote to speak from multiple sites and realities. Border-crossing becomes, thus, a way of interrogating reality that neither negates nor essentialises difference. It is also, as the case of Tijuana Calling proves, a playful reminder of the pervasive and arbitrary nature of borders and of the creative possibilities -and obstacles- that face those daring to cross them.

[1]Guillermo Gasmez Peata, "The Free Trade Art Agreement/ El Tratado de Libre Cultura", in *The New World Border: Prophecies, Poems & Loqueras for the End of the Century* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1996), 5.

[2]See the Tijuana Calling site: <http://www.insite05.org/internal.php?pid=15-358>

[3]Gasmez Peata, 10.

[4]See <http://www.turistafronterizo.net/choose.html>

[5]See <http://www.lowdrone.com>

[6]Gasmez Peata, 12

tags

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