

LINE OF BREATH: EL QUERER TOCAR

by

Isabella Cruz-Chong

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Parsons The New School for Design,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Fine Arts in Design and Technology.

Faculty:

Kate Sicchio and Andrew Zornoza, Thesis Studio, Spring 2015

Kate Sicchio and Edward Jefferson, Thesis Studio, Fall 2016

Thesis website:

<http://lineofbreath.com>

Copyright 2016 Isabella Cruz-Chong

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

I grew up crossing the border between Tijuana, Mexico and San Diego, California. This upbringing created in me a liminal state of being that I embody and inhabit. *Line of Breath* is a sound installation that manifests this state and attempts to give life to this in-between zone. The installation consists of a series of transducers and custom speakers attached to a 15-meter section of the metal border fence in Tijuana. It plays sound recordings of my breathing, transforming the fence into a single speaker, a single living unit. One hears a single, breathing soundscape coming from the transducers, and when one leans towards the fence to the custom speakers, one hears a second breath sound recording. The work reveals the coexistence of two perceived opposites and, with it, acknowledges and draws attention to this often neglected space overlooked by dualistic or politicized points of view. The research for the piece drew from touch, sound, earth art and socially-engaged art in the context of liminality, boundaries and politics. The project started as an identity exploration and grew to include community involvement. Ultimately, *Line of Breath* has led me to reflect on the redefinition of boundaries, not only physically, but mentally and emotionally.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 5

Concept 6

CHAPTER 2: INFLUENCES / PRECEDENTS 9

Embracing the Intangible 10

Externalizing the In-between 15

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY 23

Creative Values 24

Process Documentation 25

Stream of Thought 37

Borderless 37

Ella 37

While Writing the Paper 38

A Concept That Keeps Growing 39

Drawings / Notes 41

CHAPTER 4: EVALUATION / ANALYSIS 44

My Fence 45

Mi barda 45

Drawings / Notes 47

Installation at Tijuana 50

CREDITIS / SPECIAL THANKS 65

BIBLIOGRAPHY 66

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION



Instagram @icruzchong

Concept:

It started from my desire to touch *it*. I had to first figure out what *it* was. Now I understand that *it* is always changing since it is a state of being. *It* is ambiguous, magical and undefined; and through the work I attempt to touch *it*, hear *it* and feel *it*. My search for *it* was born from a young urge to define my identity. This urge came from constantly crossing the border between Tijuana, Mexico and San Diego, California. "The uniqueness of a boundary is that it is a line which not only divides but which, if crossed, induces a sudden or extraordinary change in the traversing body or object."¹ This "line with effects"² first prompted me to identify as Mexican and to feel like an outsider in the US, to later learning and appropriating American culture, to now, where I feel I stand between both countries. This in-between is what I am calling *it*. It is a liminal space that it is born from both countries or has been there before the countries were formed. I believe I inhabit and embody this space.

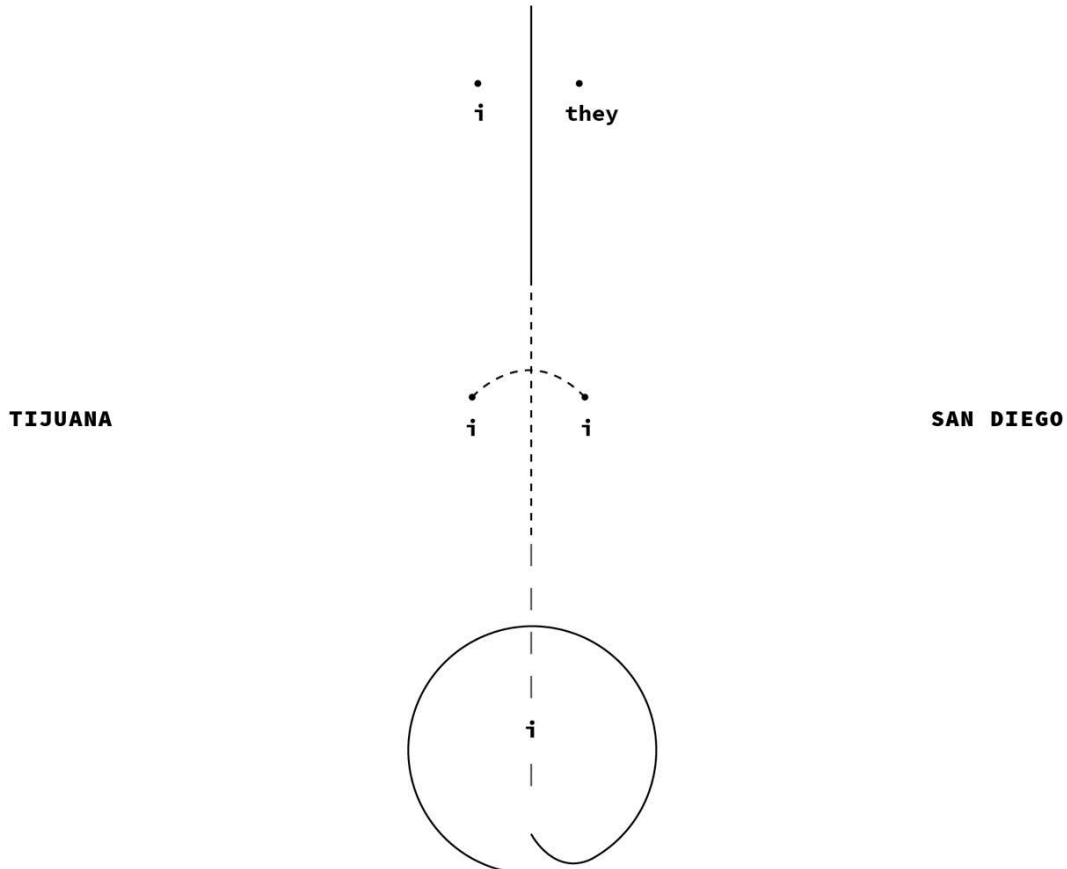


Figure 1. State of being

¹ Shields, 3
² Shields, 2

The art project, *Line of Breath*, is an attempt to physically and sensorily manifest this liminal state of mind. The desire is to make this state more “real” for myself and to be able to share it with others. It seems it is easier to share with others if it takes a physical form that all the senses can experience. How does one externalize a liminal state of being? How does one physically manifest a unification of opposites? How does one make the in-between a real, timeless space, not just a *temporal instant*? These are the challenges the project attempts to explore since “borders are normatively defined as ‘to-be-crossed,’ not travelled along.”³

The political metal fence represents this in-between space and at the same time divides it by not letting it expand, given that borders’ nature is “inelastic, they establish the fixity of this shape.”⁴ In this case though, the fence has surpassed its main purpose to limit and it mentally has become part of my state of being, and with this state comes a desire to transform it. The project places my own self in this metal fence as a gesture of giving physical life to this in-between state. My hope is to alleviate the friction between the two opposites that crash in this line, and I argue for the possibility of opposites co-existing in one space. *Line of Breath* started as an exploration on identity and, given its geographical location and political function, the project has grown to include community involvement acknowledging this socially neglected in-between that is overlooked from a dualistic or political point of view.

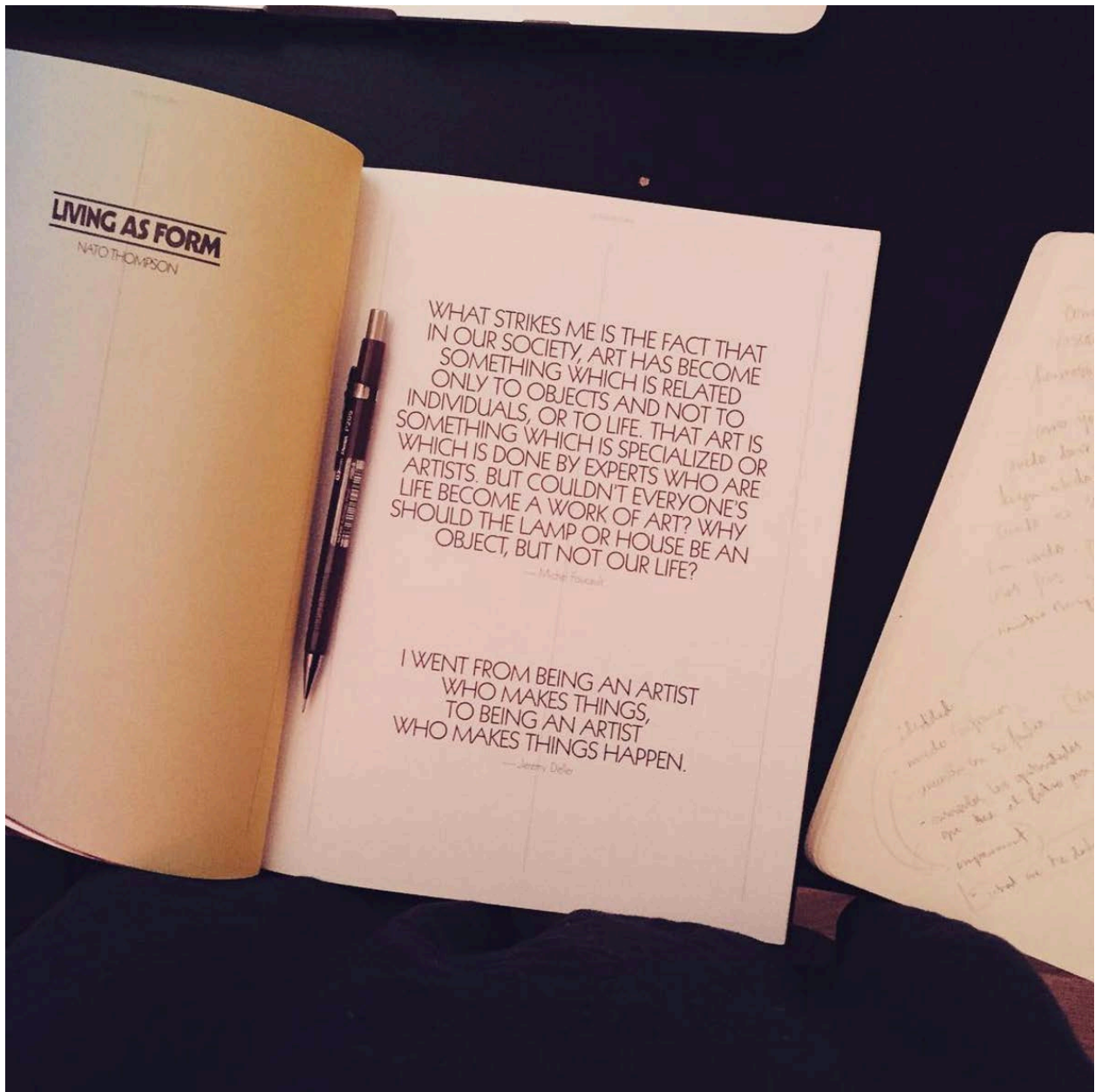
Drawing precedents on earth art and socially engaged art, *Line of Breath* is a sound installation embedded on the United States/Mexico political fence. The sound recordings of my breathing are physically attached to the metal fence, transforming the fence into a single speaker, a single living unit. The installation took place in Tijuana, Mexico on April 8th and 9th, 2016 occupying 15 meters of the fence, where puck transducers and hand-made custom speakers were placed on the fence. During two hours each day, the installation played and welcomed any visitors. As a person arrived, one heard a breathing soundscape coming from the transducers. When one leaned towards the fence to the custom speakers, he or she heard another breathing recording, adding a second layer to the soundscape. The project will be exhibited in May 2016 at Parsons School of Design at New York City and in June 2016 at the Smack Mellon gallery in Brooklyn. The gallery sound installation consists of an 8ft x 8ft fence made with corrugated metal sheets where puck transducers will be playing the breath sound recording. This fence will be accompanied by a video documentation of the work process and installation in Tijuana.

As of now, *Line of Breath* consists of a site-specific sound installation, a gallery

³ Shields, 4
⁴ Shields, 4

sound installation and a video documentary of the work process of the installation at Tijuana. Each of these different channels point out different characteristics of the liminal space and are made for different audiences. The project has lead me to reflect on redefining mental and emotional boundaries, not just those that are physical.

CHAPTER 2: INFLUENCES / PRECEDENTS



Living as Form by Nato Thompson. Instagram @icruzchong

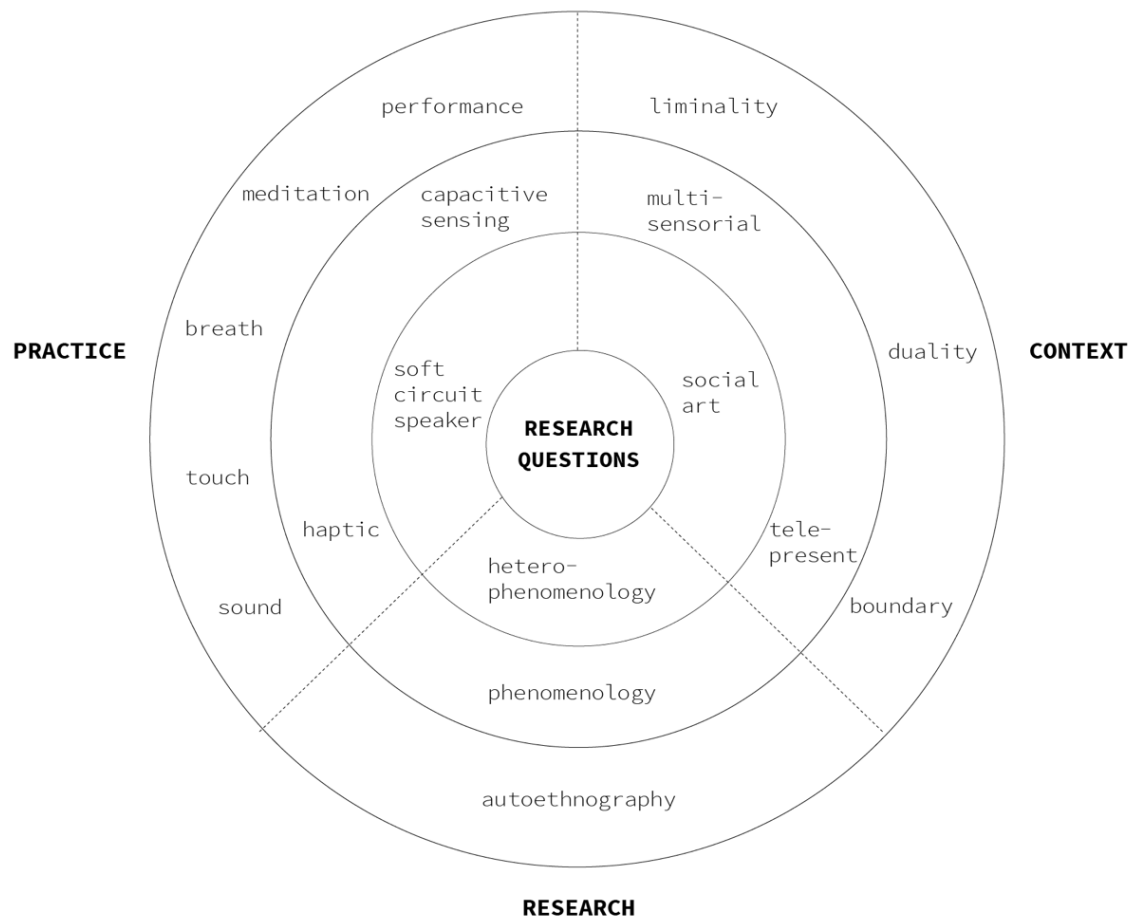


Figure 2. Practice, Context and Research for Line of Breath

Embracing the Intangible:

Why Touch?

“How could I come from a nation? How can a human being come from a concert?... To me, a country – this thing that could be born, die, expand, contract – hardly seemed the bases for understanding a human being... These are the places that shape my experience. My experience is where I’m from.” – Taiye Selasi⁵

Two places that have shaped up experience and identity are Tijuana, Mexico and San Diego, California. These places have shaped my life’s experience and my identity. I remember when I was around 10 years old, my parents would say, “If someone asks where you are from and you are in San Diego, say San Diego. If you are in Tijuana say

⁵ Selasi

Tijuana.” The reason for this was that I was born in Austin, Texas, but at school in Tijuana, I was registered as Mexican. At such a young age this instruction caused me great confusion and I questioned why it was that I had to behave this way. For the following 10 years, I pushed myself to answer the question: Where am I from? The way I started to explore how to answer this question was by researching about the senses since I felt a big desired to touch the place where I was from.

The Possibility of Accessing

BJ Miller, a palliative care physician, explains: “As long as we have our senses, even just one, we have at least the possibility of accessing what makes us feel human.”⁶ In the use of one’s body and senses, one can come into contact with one’s core, one’s sense of humanity. Through a realization such as this, one can be more connected to one’s self by recognizing the body and senses as essential elements of one’s identity. A way to explore a liminal space and state of mind is by paying attention to how one’s body relates and how one’s senses perceive. By truly connecting to one’s self, it becomes possible to connect to others.

Ratey explains, “understanding how we see, hear, touch, smell and even taste the world can tell us a lot about how we function in it.”⁷ Too often in western society does one disconnect from their physical presence, a disconnection that can make one unaware of or indifferent to the important roles they play as a human. The body is constantly letting one know of its physical, mental and emotional needs, and by not paying attention to it, it is harder to stay conscious the self and, in turn, make connections with others.

For an artist, using one’s art process and piece to understand and explore how the senses work helps to create a stronger connection with the audience, therefore making sure the piece’s message is received. An interesting use of the sense of smell is the art installation, *Aire* by Teresa Margolles (*Figure 3*). In this installation the audience walks into a room with a strong, unclear, and unique sense of smell. The audience comes to realize that the smell, is that of water vapor originating from the Mexico City morgue. The water vapor was specifically taken from procedures during the cleaning of Ciudad Juarez corpses in preparation for autopsy. The artist uses the sense of smell to directly connect the audience to Mexico’s violence, which is already apparent across multiple news media outlet. However, such outlets definitely do not invoke the same sensation and realization of physically inhaling it.

⁶ Miller

⁷ Ratey, 55.



Figure 3. Aire by Teres Margolles

It is important to mention that each sense has a unique role in experiencing the world, and how we use each of them one sends a distinct message. Pallasma explains the current understanding of the senses by saying, "Vision and hearing are now the privileged sociable senses, whereas the other three are considered as archaic sensory remnants with a merely private function, and they are usually suppressed by the code of culture."⁸ By suppressing some of our senses and by extension parts of our body, one is missing the information that such senses would be giving to help make more sense of the surrounding environment. For this and several other reasons, the sense I will be specifically investigating in order to embody and convey my message, is the sense of touch.

Touch

"Desire is the nature of touch."⁹ When I was in a long distance relationship, I started paying more attention to my sense of touch. All my precious memories from that time were tangible experiences. The first art installation I made that focused on the sense of touch was made in the first months of us living together. This sense has become a comforting tool that has come the closest for helping me figure out when something is real. It is important to notice that by touch, I do not only mean physically touching a certain person or object but also feeling through my body's own sense of intuition. In order for me to convey to myself and others the liminal space and state of mind that I come from, it has become essential for me to incorporate touch exploration in the process. I believe that being able to "touch" this liminal space will help me feel as I truly am and in such a way that is easier for me to describe to others.

At the end of her career, Lygia Clark incorporated the body and touch in her work. "She moved from a visual language in the purest sense to a language of the body, not performed or spectated but lived by the participant in a way which enabled an efficacious, healing relationship to take place in the face of life's crisis."¹⁰

⁸ Pallasma, 16.

⁹ Herkenhoff, 328.

¹⁰ Brett, 58.

(Figure 4) What I am discovering is that I am setting up a process in helping and healing my own identity struggle so as to have the confidence to both communicate with it and be at peace with it.



Figure 4. *Máscaras sensoriais* by Lygia Clark

Another main reason why I am drawn to the sense of touch is because of its healing characteristics. This past summer I suffered from an intense spasm that led me to find out that I have endometriosis. This has made me change my diet and the way I treat my body. It has forced me to feel my body and follow its lead, and by doing so I have been feeling physically, mentally and emotionally better. I am becoming physically conscious of my own well-being. I am becoming my own and most important companion.

The physician, Abraham Verghese, describes the importance of human touch:

“I percussed. I palpated. I listened to the chest. I think he surely must have known by then that it was vital for me just as it was necessary for him. Neither of us could skip this ritual, which had nothing to do with detecting rales in the lung, or finding the gallop rhythm of heart failure. No, this ritual was about the one message that physicians have needed to convey to their patients. And the message ... which I understand better now, is this: I will always, always, always be there. I will see you through this. I will never abandon you. I will be with you through the end.”¹¹

I am embodying and creating a tangible experience for the liminal space and state of mind where I come from in order to feel it and take it with me wherever I go.

Physical Actions

In order for me to convey a very personal message to a greater audience and for them to relate to it in their own personal way, I will be working with the Mexican immigrant community in New York City and the border communities to help me activate

¹¹ Verguese, Ted Talk 2011

and physically transform the border that divides Tijuana and San Diego. These kinds of actions “create forms of living that activate communities and advance public awareness of pressing social issues. In the process, they expand models of art, advance ways of being an artist, and involve new publics in their efforts.”¹²

If the art project works, my personal story, embodiment and action will be able to touch other’s people personal story and maybe even inspire them to imagine their own liminal space and act based on it. As Francis Alys explains his project *When Faith Moves Mountains*, “If the script meets the expectations and addresses the anxieties of that society at this time and place, it may become a story that survives the event itself. At that moment, it has the potential to become a fable or an urban myth.”¹³ (Figure 5).



Figure 5. *When Faith Moves Mountains* by Francis Alys

It is not necessary for everyone’s liminal space to be exactly as mine or to experience it as I do, but the key is for people to ask themselves if they each have that space, how they define it and why it is important. As the spiritual teacher, Thomas Hubl, says “loving life does not mean I have to agree with everything but I have to experience it, and that is the difference. Saying yes to life, I can have the experience of what it is and I can respond to it.”¹⁴

Conclusion

Due to globalization and immigration, more people have been redefining where they come from and their identity. One example is the third culture kids, “[they] are not a new phenomenon. They’ve been around since the beginning of time, but, until now, they have been largely invisible. This has been changing, however, for at least three reasons: Their number has increased, their public voice has grown louder and their significance

¹² Pasternak, 8

¹³ Alys, 39

¹⁴ Hubl

has increased.”¹⁵ Although more people are redefining what countries mean to them, the general structure of society, along with some people in it, still retains the traditional view and behavior of categorizing people and spaces by their region, resulting in prejudices, racism, and violence.

As more people connect and embrace their own borderless space and state of mind, society will cease to define itself by real world social, political, or cultural borders that hinder their growth as human beings.

Externalizing the In-Between:

“Stability of social order relies not only on neat oppositions but also on the acceptance of the unclassifiable, of surprises and coincidences, ambiguity and fuzziness.” – Bernhard Giesen

Liminality

Liminal means to relate to or being in an intermediate state, phase or condition. Liminality is the state of uncertainty or disorientation that occurs halfway through a ritual, where the participant leaves their old position but has not completely transitioned to their new one. The concept was developed by the anthropologist, Victor Turner “by studying rites of passage or through a processual analysis of unstructured situations.”¹⁶ Today, the word liminality is not only used in the context of rites of passage, but it also “transmits cultural practices, codes, rituals, and meanings in-between aggregate structures and uncertain outcomes.”¹⁷ Due to our current society where there is constant change and new ways of interconnectedness the idea of liminality has become necessary to study the “in-betweenness” of any transformation and connection. The struggle appears when this in-betweenness has not been defined and therefore it is hard to relate to and sometimes even feared. “Liminality captures in-between situations and conditions characterized by the dislocation of established structures, the reversal of hierarchies, and uncertainty about the continuity of tradition and future outcomes.”¹⁸ This uncertainty is unavoidable and essential to look into but since its nature is ambiguous and asks us to redefine our truths many times it is overlooked.

Through my thesis project I am externalizing a liminal state in order to give respect to the experience and the people that go through it. This liminal state is in-between

¹⁵ Pollock & Van Reken, 4.

¹⁶ Szokolczai, 16

¹⁷ Horvath, Thomassen, Wydra, 2

¹⁸ Giesen, 62

countries with opposite cultures and political status but their humanity has made it possible to create this liminal space between them. It is easier for some to neglect this space and its people since acknowledging them and their importance would require significant changes that would redefine both sides. I believe eventually there will be a space and acceptance given to these people and my part on this transition is to physically externalize this experience. By externalizing it won't be myself pointing to this space and asking respect for it, but it will be the physical liminal space itself asking for it. In a need to externalize this liminal state in a graceful, respectful and powerful manner my research has lead me to look into ways that film, literature and contemporary people have externalized their own liminal state.

Since the essence of liminality is ambiguous, limitless and uncertain, it is impossible to define specific ways in which one externalizes a liminal state. Every externalization is dependent upon ever-changing factors, including one's consciousness, unconsciousness and context. As these keep changing so does the externalization. As of now I have found three qualities that point out to an externalization of a liminal state: juxtaposition, pain and creation. These are manifested separately or simultaneously, along with other aspects, and they are all related to each other.

Juxtaposition

Through comparing and contrasting two elements, new information and connections appear, making reference to a liminal state between them. This technique is often seen in films due to its strong visual qualities. In the film, *Alphaville* by Jean Luc Godard, the city of Alphaville transitions from having citizens feeling no emotions to having one citizen experience love for the first time and causing an emotional reconfiguration for the rest of the city. Godard subtly externalizes this character's liminality through her behavior:

*Natacha Von Braun: [after shaking no] Yes.*¹⁹

The character expresses a "no" and a "yes" at the same time so they both cancel each other and convey her confusion which is a characteristic of her evolution. This externalization is powerful and elegant because it sums up the intensity of the transition in a quick and subtle way.

Another way to show juxtaposition is through strong visuals. A beautiful example is found in the film *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Figure 6). The main

¹⁹ *Alphaville*, Godard

character, Joel, is in a liminal state where he is simultaneously living his present moment while also re-living past memories that are immediately being erased one after the other. The director, Michel Gondry, conveys Joel's in-betweenness by visually juxtaposing his memories with his present. His memories are presented with bright colors filled with intense emotions and his present is visually dull as he is emotionally numb.



Figure 6. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*



Figure 7. *El Laberinto del Fauno*

Another powerful visual juxtaposition happens in the film *El Laberinto del Fauno* by Guillermo del Toro (Figure 7). In the film, Ofelia is a young stepdaughter of a sadistic army officer and copes with all the violence that surrounds her by escaping to a captivating fantasy world. Throughout the movie the viewers see Ofelia coping with her in-betweenness as they are also put in an emotionally unstable state by being presented with the real and fantastic worlds forcing the viewers to choose which reality is true if they are not comfortable with holding both as real.

Through the use of juxtaposition one sees the transition happening in the character's context as well as in him or her as well as how the character decides to cope with it consciously or unconsciously. Natacha externalize it through her behavior, Michel Gondry conveyed it visually and Ofelia escaped it through fantasy. Unfortunately, there are times when a transitional phase is too overwhelming and hurtful that all one externalizes is suffering.

Pain

"An experience means that once previous certainties are removed and one enters a delicate, uncertain, malleable state, something might happen to one that alters the very core of one's being."²⁰ Juxtaposing two realities is the first sign of a liminal state but once these are exposed the important aspect of the experience is the emotional effect. Sometimes this transition comes by surprise and its unsettling

²⁰ Szokolczai, 18

quality brings anxiety, which is expressed through pain. The decision on how to deal with the pain is what defines the end point of the transition.

A painful liminal state is seen in the film *Mar Adentro* by Alejandro Amenabar (*Figure 8*). The main character is based on the real-life story of Ramon Sampedro. Ramon is left quadriplegic after a diving accident and fights for his right to end his life. He lives in a constant painful experience where he is trapped in-between precious memories and death (*Figure 9*). Throughout the movie he is fighting and suffering to finally get to the other side. At the end, he is able to end his life through the help of a friend. For him, his transitional state led him to death.



Figure 8. *Mar Adentro*

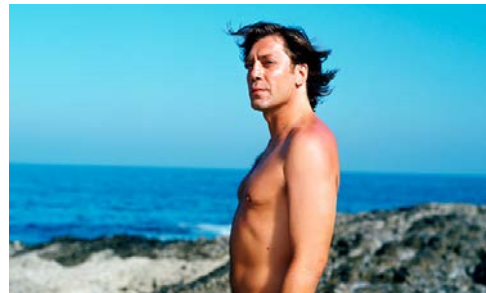


Figure 9. *Mar Adentro*

Another character that led himself to death is Ajax from the Greek mythology. Ajax was a Greek hero who fought in the Trojan War. Due to his pride and stubbornness, he becomes dishonorable. At this in-between moment he becomes conscious of change and he says the following to his followers,

I must give way, as all dread strengths give way,
in turn and deference. Winter's hard-packed snow
cedes to the fruitful summer; stubborn night
at last withdraws, so white-horsed day can shine.
The dread blast of the gale slackens and gives
Peace to the sounding sea; and Sleep, strong jailer,
In time yields up his captive.²¹

Even though he comes to this realization, it does not mean that he accepts his transformation, and since it is painful, he decides to end it by committing suicide (*Figure 10*).

²¹ Sophocles, translated by John Moore, 44



Figure 10. Ajax

These past examples showed two people who are very conscious of their pain but there are other people who are not or prefer to run away from it. This behavior then becomes the expression of their liminal state. One example is David from the book *Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin. David is a liminal character by being an American living in France that is simultaneously dealing with his homosexuality though he is engaged to marry a woman. Throughout the story he sustains his engagement while also having a love affair with a man called Giovanni. Even though his homosexuality is obvious to him and others, he never accepts it and instead decides to hide his true self, "I had decided to allow no room in the universe for something which shamed and frightened me. I succeeded very well – by not looking at the universe, but not looking at myself, by remaining, in effect, in constant motion."²² For David, it was better to cope with the transition by escaping than being shameful.

This same book, *Giovanni's Room*, is the externalization of the liminal state of the writer James Baldwin (*Figure 11*). Baldwin was an openly gay African American writer and social critic from the mid 20th century. His way of conveying his liminal state was by voicing out his ideals through writings and protests. This example leads me to the most beautiful manifestation of a liminal state: creation.



Figure 11. James Baldwin

²² Baldwin

Creation

“You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, or who had ever been alive.” – James Baldwin

The power and beauty of a liminal state comes up when one sees that this experience is shared with others therefore it becomes worth manifesting it in order to create social change. James Baldwin could have decided to hide and run from his state of being but instead he voiced it out and created work that became part of a larger social change that is visible today.

Another writer that deals and conveys her in-betweenness by making work is Sandra Cisneros (*Figure 12*). She is a Latin American writer, born in Chicago, Illinois, who has experienced liminal states by growing up in a latin community in Chicago as well as migrating between Mexico and the United States. In her writing she has smoothly combined both languages, English and Spanish creating a new third language. In her short story collection, *Women Hollering Creek and Other Stories*, she writes “La Gritona. Such a funny name for such a lovely arroyo. But that’s what they called the creek that ran behind the house.”²³ The ingenious quality of these sentences is how Cisneros inserts a Spanish word and elegantly explains its meaning in the next sentence. Beyond expressing her bicultural identity, she also puts the reader in an in-between position by asking him or her to read two languages.



Figure 12. Sandra Cisneros



Figure 13. *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros

Cisneros also conveys a transition through her characters’ personalities. In *The House of Mango Street* (*Figure 13*), a young girl, Esperanza explains, “I would like to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X. Yes. Something like Zeze the X will

²³ Cisneros

do.”²⁴ Esperanza is not sure of who she is or will become and she represents this by calling herself X. Whichever name she chooses, it is certain that she knows this other side of herself will come out. This is an example of a character being somewhat conscious of her transition and finding excitement in it. Eventually Esperanza finds out she wants to get out of Mango Street and become a writer.

Another contemporary artist who also felt physically in the wrong place was Ana Mendieta. She was a Cuban American artist who at a young age was sent from Cuba to the United States, under the auspice of Operation Pedro Pan, to escape the communist ruler Fidel Castro. Her work came from her liminal state of being physically manifesting a need to reconnect to her roots. She became known for her *Siluetas Series* (Figure 14) where she created female silhouettes in nature using her own body. In her 1981 artist statement, she wrote, “I have been carrying on a dialogue between the landscape and the female body (based on my own silhouette) I am overwhelmed by the feeling of having been cast from the womb (nature). Through my earth/body sculptures I become one with the earth I become an extension of nature and nature becomes an extension of my body.”²⁵



Figure 14. *Siluetas series* by Ana Mendieta

Baldwin, Cisneros and Mendieta physically interfere with their surrounding and give life to new mindsets. These mindsets have the potential to initiate or contribute to social change. Due to their nature of manifesting in current defined structures some of these acts are seen as activism. This will be future theme for my research.

Conclusion

“Liminality is commonly regarded as the space of new political beginning, a potential source of renewal for a community, or even a platform for large-scale societal

²⁴ Cisneros
²⁵ Mendieta

change.”²⁶ When does externalizing liminality become activism? How can the manifestation of liminality keep people’s minds open to listen to the message?

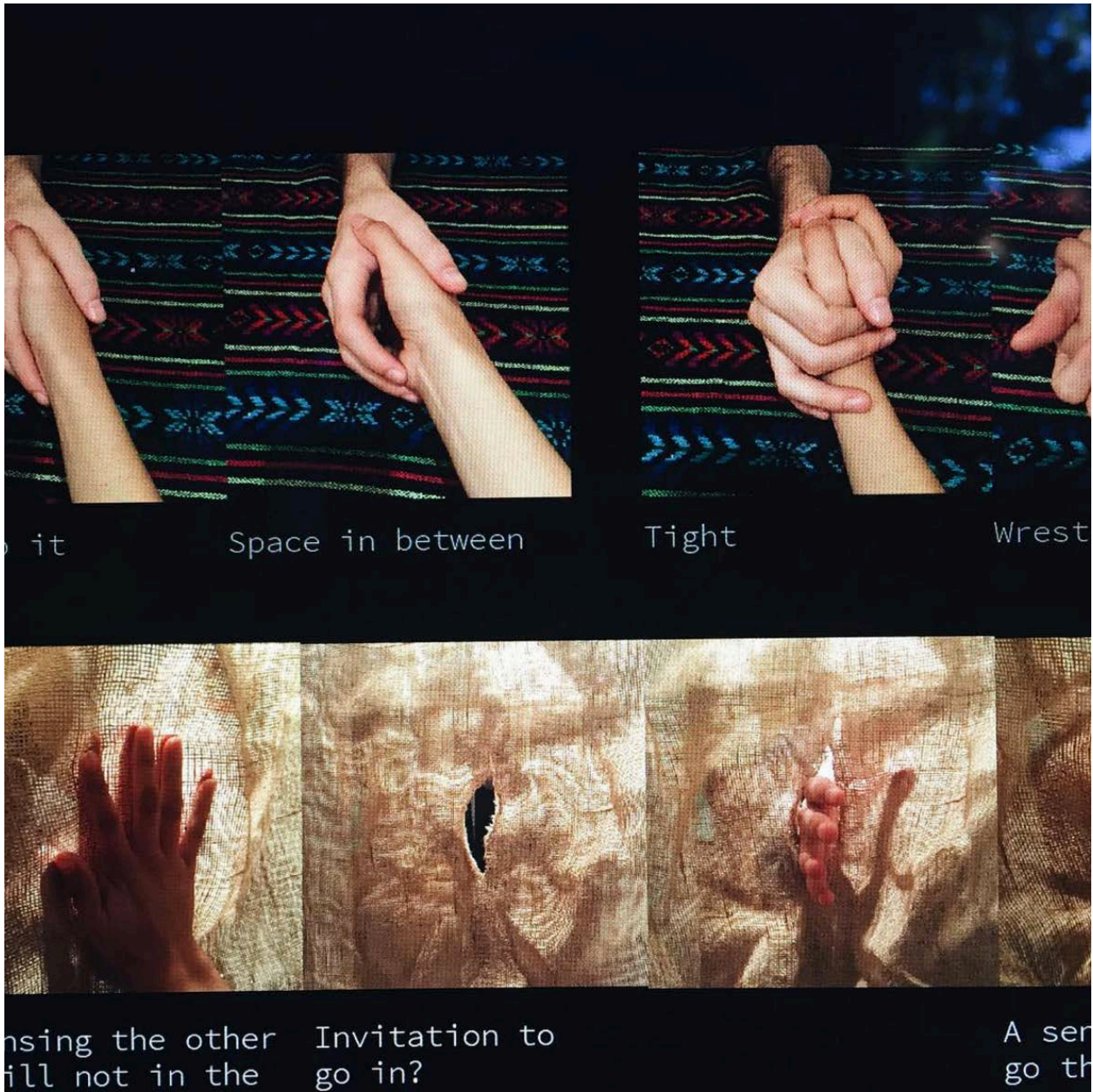
Since my current project consists on physically externalizing a personal and shared liminal state on a controversial political fence, the project is at risk of being purely seen from an activist point of view instead of a humanistic one. I will be researching artists like Ai Wei Wei, Doris Salcedo and Francys Alys to understand how manifestations geared towards activism and when the message itself overcomes its political aspect.

“The prospect of the possible permanentization of liminality emanates danger because it lacks the promise of reintegration that would reestablish the previous order.”²⁷ How would my project give a sense of interconnectedness and hope instead of danger?

Since my current project consists on physically externalizing a personal and shared liminal state on a controversial political fence, the project is at risk of being purely seen from an activist point of view instead of a humanistic one.

²⁶ Malksoo, 233
²⁷ Malksoo, 234

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY



Instagram @icruzchong

Creative Values:

The following creative values were considered through the process and in the final project.

I. Site-responsive

The project does not aim to replicate the space itself, but uses and responds to the actual space.

II. Mutualist

The project activates the space in which the inserted elements are not disrupting the current space and the current space embraces these in order to complement each other.

III. Intimately Organic

The project seeks to use raw organic elements and to arrange them for an intimate audience interaction.

IV. Collective

A shared experience made by a group of people.

Process Documentation:

September 2015

– What are some examples of work that use touch to produce empathy towards “the other?”

At the beginning of the process, I knew I wanted to somehow connect to the in-between state that I felt. In order to feel close and intimate with it, I started exploring touch and how it can or cannot create a connection to “the other” (Figure 15). Through this exploration I found how personal and complex human touch is. I considered exploring the in-between space by touching other people. Through these explorations I found other types of liminal states, but not exactly the one I decided to explore in this case.



Figure 15. Human touch

October 2015

- How can touch and technology create a sense of unity across a politically divided border?
- How can I facilitate touch and connection across the US/Mexico border while also connecting to a third space of coexistence?
- How can I unify the two cultures I embody and create a physical and tactile connection between the two?
- How can I experience and convey the liminal space that I embody and create a physical tactile experience to connect to it?

In order to redirect my explorations toward the liminal state that I feel between Tijuana and San Diego, I started asking myself questions that had the specific location and the connection between the countries in mind. I was still exploring touch but was now connecting it to technology in order to “touch” a distant space. The prototype consisted of physically touching leaves alongside an onscreen video that would show moving leaves, giving the sense that one caused the other to move. The aspect that grabbed my attention the most was how “connected” I felt to what I was looking at on the screen. At that moment, I knew that what I truly wanted to “touch” was the in-between space itself, the border fence.

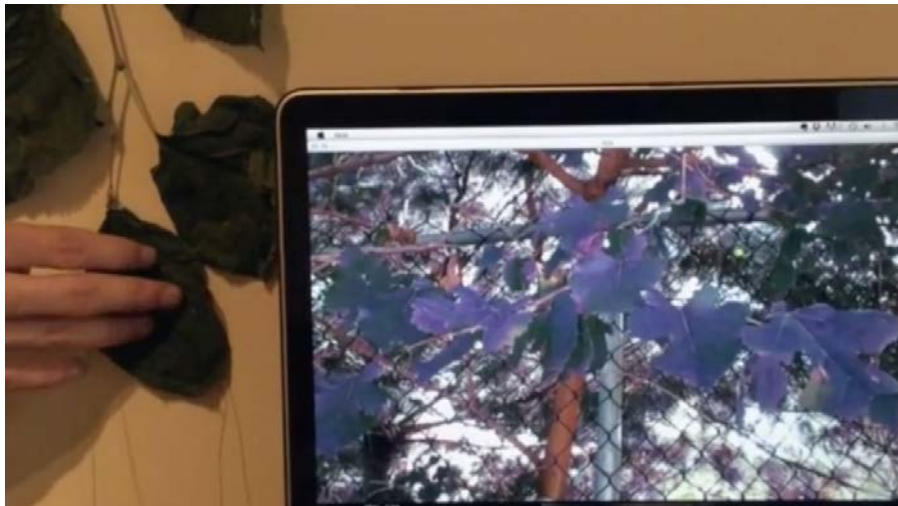


Figure 16. Human touch and technology

Through that realization, my next prototype came to be. I tied a rope on my arm, and while unwinding it, I could see on the screen how the fabric was getting disintegrated by the unwinding. The fabric represented the border fence itself.



Figure 17. Telepresence

I realized how powerful it felt to be able to transform and physically manifest the in-between space that I was feeling inside. At that time the project became a telepresence performance, where I would perform a certain action in New York City and that action would be imitated by a machine in Tijuana that would transform the border fence.

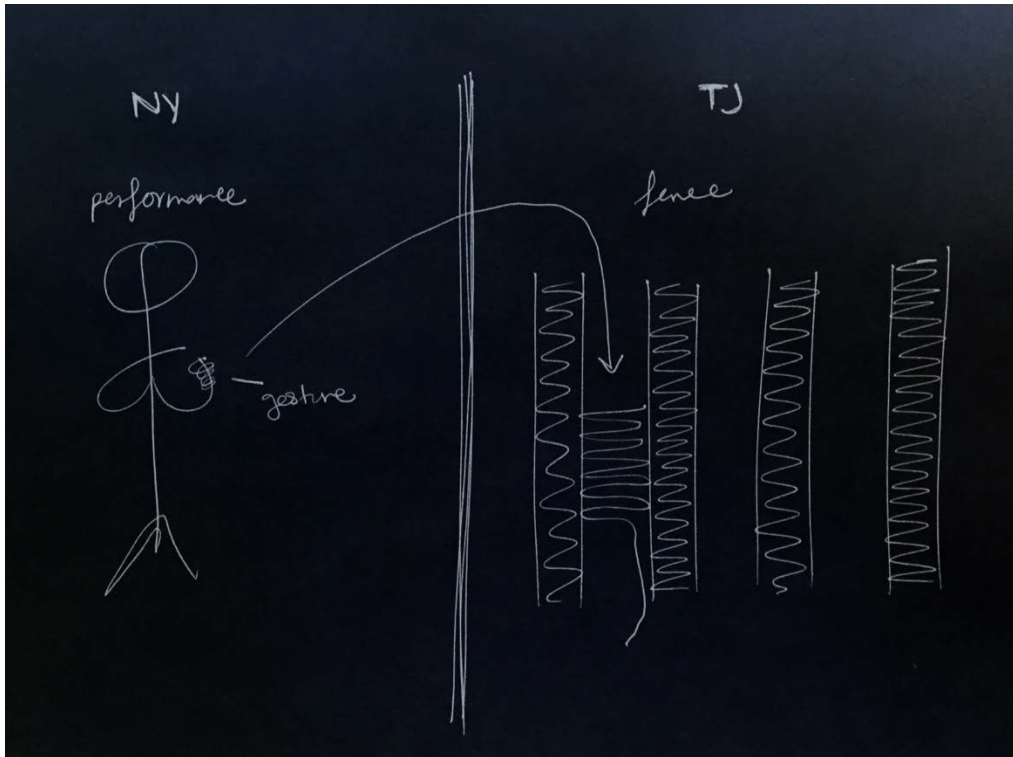


Figure 18. Telepresence sketch

November 2015

- How does one externalize their liminal state of being through sound and space?

At the end of October, I explored ways to physically transform the border fence through a telepresence performance. The majority of the explorations had an aspect of destroying and violating the fence, which I was not working toward. That led me to use another medium in order to transform the fence: sound. Given the nature of sound, it seemed right to use it in order to negotiate mental spaces and find a liminal state of being. During November I started trying out different kinds of transducers, pucks and wave shields in a metal fence. Since I did not want to destroy the fence but instead manifest the liminal state that it embodies for me, I decided to “wake up” that space. The way I decided to do it was through using sounds of breath. Breath is a function everyone can identify with and is the sign of one being alive. I decided to give life to this in-between space by giving it breath.



Figure 19. Transducer on corrugated metal

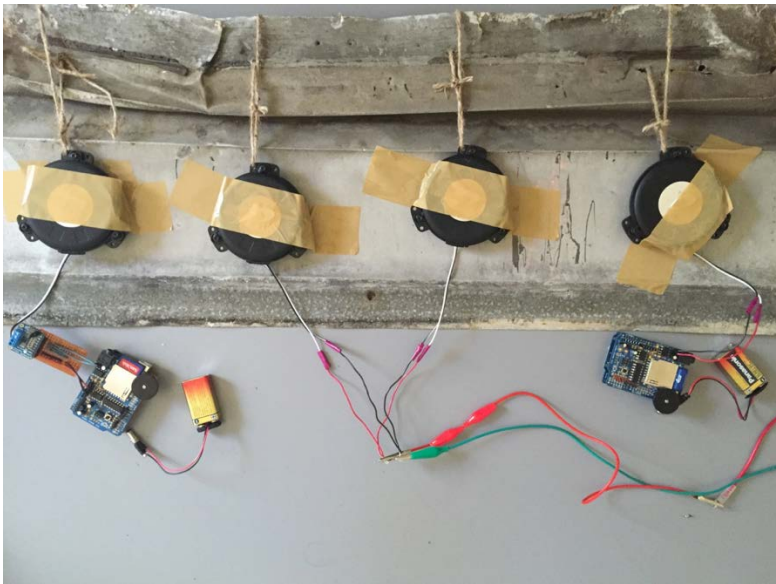


Figure 20. Puck transducers and wave shields on corrugated metal

December 2015

- How does one externalize a liminal state of being?
- How can space be used to convey an in-between?
- How can sound give dimensionality and a human aspect?
- How can it become a shared experience?

In December the project became a collective idea. This came to be mainly because in my past work, whenever I have talked or represented this political border, it had been only from my personal point of view. I now want to open that view to other “voices” to give it dimensionality. I believe that when a project becomes site-responsive it has to consider the community, and this became one of the priorities of the project. In order to incorporate more breath recordings from other people without adding heavy

sound equipment to the fence and to give it visual and physical dimensionality, I decided to work with soft circuit speakers.

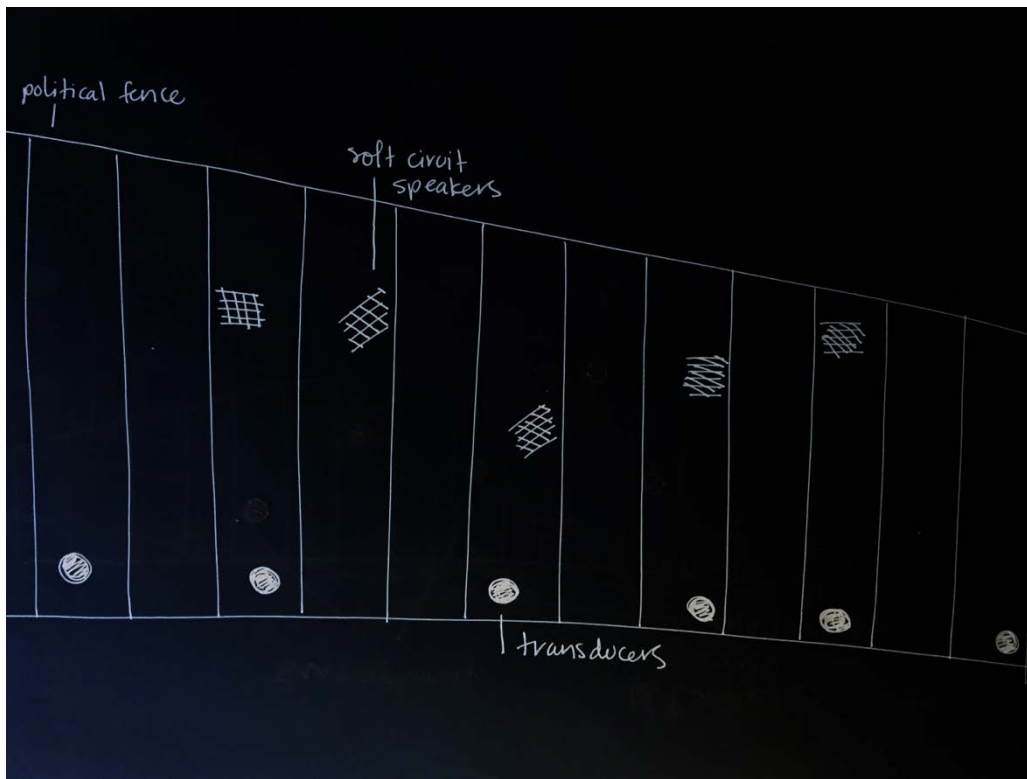


Figure 21. Sound sketch

The main idea was to have big transducers hidden at the bottom of the fence that would play my own breath in order to grab people's attention. When people get closer, they would start hearing more breath recordings coming from the soft circuit speakers embedded on the fence. I started exploring materials and the process to construct hand made speakers.

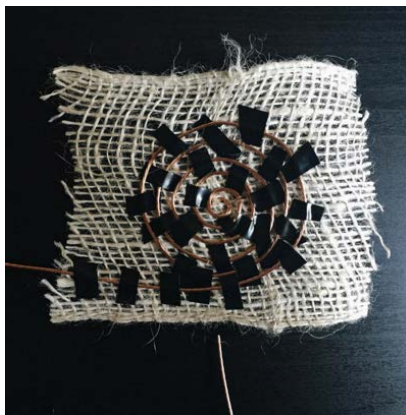




Figure 22. Soft circuit explorations



Figure 23. Soft circuit explorations on soft copper

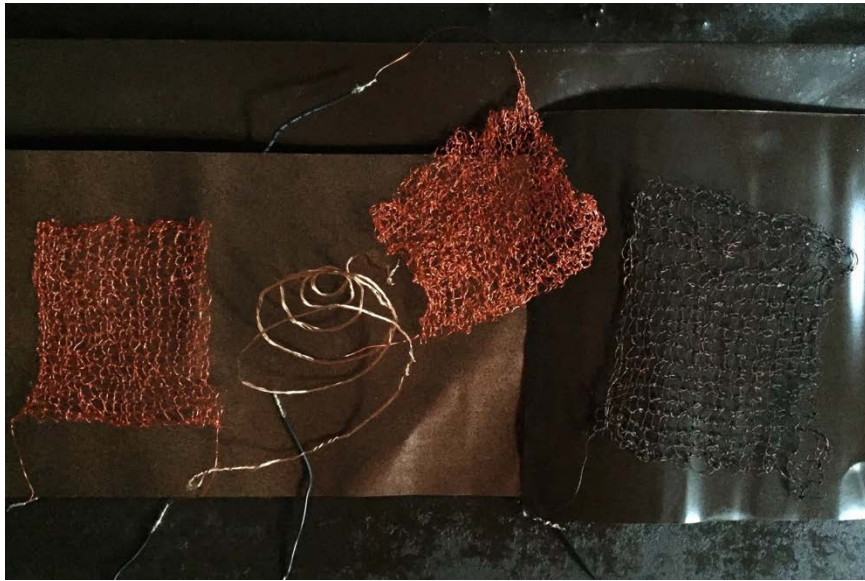


Figure 24. Soft circuit color palette with enameled copper wire 32awg and sprayed paint soft copper

I decided to build the speakers by hand knitting enameled copper wire. This process allowed me to have the “touch” I was looking for at the beginning of the process, the physical labor which represents the difficulty that I sometimes encounter when dealing with this liminal space, and lastly, the best aesthetic to go with the border fence.

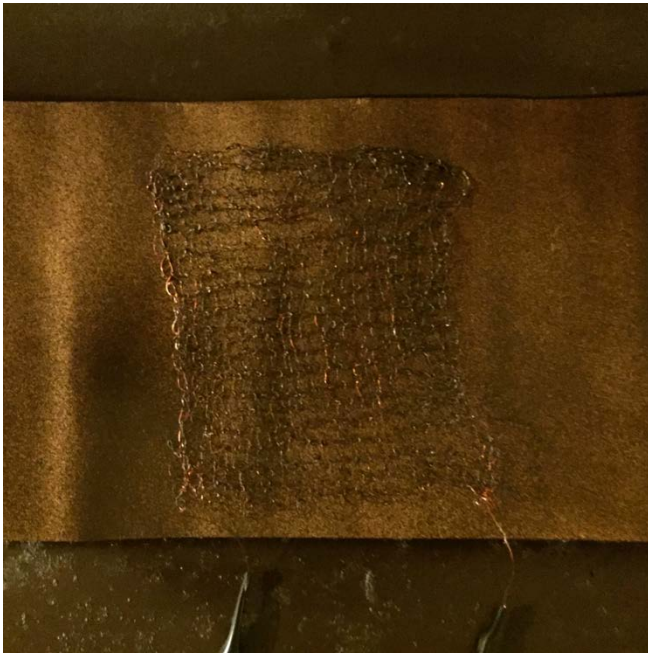


Figure 25. Soft circuit made by knitted enameled copper wire 32awg and soft copper



Figure 26. Fence with soft circuit speaker prototype



Figure 27. Mockup of installation on Tijuana, Mexico

January 2016

- How does sound move through material?
- How does one decide where to install a public art installation?
- How does one communicate to the general public about the art project?

During January is when the project stopped being completely personal and it started to transform into a project connecting with a complex context including residents and space. This is the month I went to Tijuana, Mexico to test the speakers and start organizing how and when it was going to take place. To my surprise, the puck transducers worked better than I imagined. They were loud enough to be heard from far away but they were not powerful enough to make the fence rumble. The custom speakers seemed like they were going to work placed in the fence but I needed to keep working on the aesthetic look of them.

Most importantly this is when I started to create a physical relationship with the fence and its surroundings. People started to stop and asked me what I was doing and I started approaching others regarding the permit and talking to the community for the first time about the project.



Figure 28. Trying custom speakers on Tijuana/San Diego fence

February 2016

- What is breath?
- How does one narrate through breath recordings?
- What is the best equipment and time to record?
- How to prepare oneself to record?



Figure 29. Voice Over Booth to record breath

This was an interesting part during the process since I took the project back again to myself by practicing and recording my breath. How does one record a calm breathing

when most of the time I am busy and overwhelmed getting everything else ready for the installation? I went to the recording studio three times, sometimes forgetting to eat and getting dizzy during the recording. During the recording it took effort to concentrate and just breath calmly. It was clear, the breath needed to be calm. What kind of breaths do I need? How do I create them? I used to imagine myself, this breath placed within the fence and record from there.

March 2016

- What is the significance of custom speakers?
- How to know how when to start and stop the process?

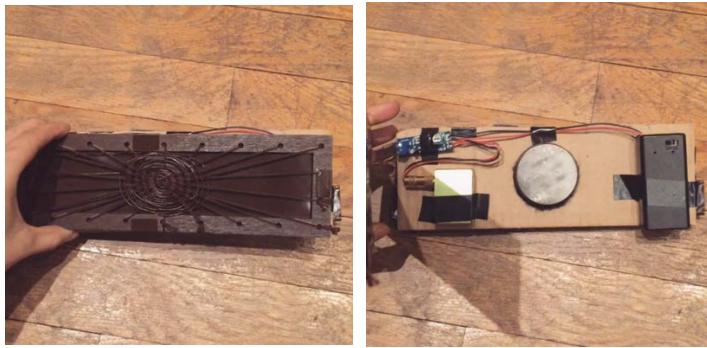


Figure 30. Second hand-made speaker

During this time, I needed to remind myself again why the need of custom speakers. The thought took me back to my personal importance of the physical work and touch. How this act placed me even more in the fence. At the same time, I edited the design of the speaker so it would work better and louder.

April 2016

- How to install the project successfully?
- How to introduce the project?
- What role do I play while the installation is playing?
- What does it mean that a project is moving locations and audiences?
- How to take what happened in Tijuana and communicate it in New York City?
- What is the focus of the New York City gallery installation?
- What is the message of the video documentary?



Figure 31. Line of Breath installation in Tijuana, Mexico

On April 8th and 9th, 2016 the installation took place for a couple of hours each day. I was very sick with an ear infection and besides taking care of the installation technically, thoughts about what is art, why do I do it, for whom also came up. I think it is common to experience this when one is not only placed inside a specific mind set but it is also in constant reminder of other areas of one's life. The installation worked. Around 25 people went. The installation was recorded and people were interviewed. Below, I write about the installation and in the final video documentary one can see the experience.

May 2016

- What needs to be exhibited? How?
- What is the connection between the Tijuana sound installation with the gallery sound exhibition and the video documentary?



Figure 32. Rusted metal sheets for sound exhibition in NYC

I am currently writing this in May and I am working in many areas of the project at the same time. For the first time I am managing a couple of people to help me out editing the video documentary and building an 8ft x 8ft fence for the exhibition at Parsons and at Smack Mellon in Brooklyn. The hardest thing to do right now is to switch mental states to be a manager, a thinker writing the thesis paper and a creative finalizing the sound. Right now it seems the fence will look similar to the actual fence in Tijuana. Although, the metal sheets are not war landing mats like the ones in the border fence. I tried to get them but I could not find any and also they are very heavy making them very hard to transport. I am still thinking how I feel about the aesthetic I chose for these metal sheets. I was careful to use metal sheets and not having them be similar to the ones that are in every warehouse in Brooklyn. I chose these texture since I think this one will give more of a sense of a fence where one cannot go through it. I am not sure about the color since it is getting very similar to the fence in Tijuana. The goal was not to replicate the actual one but to create my own. I am still working on this and will update the paper with final thoughts.

STREAM OF THOUGHT

Borderless:

(November 2015)

Que es borderless?

*Borderless es no estar atada. Unattached.
No hay de donde, de donde quieras, como quieras.
No restrictions. Out, open, flying, flotando.*

*There's no lines, there's no wall inside,
outside there is. That's what hurts.
Por que duele? Porque me dicen que soy algo que no.
Assumption, categorization, that doesn't exist.
Even though they want to.*

*Sales de los dos o de uno, pero de un tercero.
A mixture of both, of all, or none,
Sounds cliché, I don't know what other words to use.*

*Knowing me, feeling me, i know there's no border.
Eso es borderless. Es saber que eres mas de lo que te dicen que eres.
It's knowing you are more than what they say,
that you come from wherever you want to,
to do, say, think, feel as you like.*

*Vas y vienes, agarras de uno y lo dejas en el otro
y viceversa, y no para aunque quieras.
Y para que quisieras que parara?
If you have the best of both worlds.*

*Little tiny pieces all over myself, carrying within from
one to the other, from the other to that one, never stopping,
Never being able to stop it, or wanting to.
Sabiendo que eres mas que lo que te dicen.*

*I am more than you say so.
I am bigger than you say so.
Lo sabras cuando lo veas en ti.
You'll know when you see yourself as more too.*

Ella:

(Late April 2016)

*Ella, quien me dejó
me dejé tocarla
estar en ella
de alguna manera me abrazó
y yo a ella.
Las dos lo necesitábamos
andábamos peleadas.
Crecimos juntas*

*siempre juntas
ya tenia tiempo que queríamos hacer las paces.
Ya las hicimos? Ya casi.
Y si, se siente bien.*

*Ella es parte de mi, no quería. Nunca me ha gustado.
Pero ahora no puedo decir eso. Ya me gusta? No que me guste, pero veo otra cosa, veo una posibilidad, veo otro espacio. Veo un espacio. Cuando antes no había nada. Cuando antes era para no verse. Para voltearme, regresar mi mirada y verme a mi misma, sin verla a ella.*

*Ella ya me pedía algo hace un tiempo.
Se lo empece a dar poco a poco, hace mucho y lo deje.
Y volvió a regresar. Volví a escuchar que quería algo de mi. Y probablemente yo también quería algo de ella.*

Cuando decidí que si, que iba a ir a ella, que iba a tocarla, hasta me emocione. Por que no? como que ya quería. Ya queríamos. pero yo no sabia que ella quería, hasta que lo hice. Hasta que fui y la toque, hasta que puse un pedazo de mi en ella. Yo era la que tenia mas miedo. Ella ya tenia mucho tiempo esperándome.

Al ponerle un pedacito mío en ella, decidí que eso haría. Poner mis pedacitos en ella. En mi. Se sintió bien. Se escucho bien.

Así estoy empezando a darte voz, para que llames, para que te volteen a ver, tal vez, ojalá para que te escuchen. Para que hables. Para que respire.

While Writing the Paper:

(Late April 2016)

Que me estas dando? Que me estoy dando? What am I receiving? I think like everyone else I'm trying to look clearer. Look at wider, at more, look at the details right in front of me, the ones i grew up with and dissect them to dissect myself. Why would i want that? what is our need to figure out, to analyze? i can try to figure out for me, more specific. To see what I'm made out, to see where I'll go? is it always about where I come from and where I'm going? I think for me is to figure out where I can be the most help at, at my most potential. "We cant afford anymore not helping each other" Maria told me once. And it has stayed with me. Yes. A way of being, living where we are to others. Why is it too hard? or too scary? Trust. In order for me to give, there needs to be some trust. That I won't fall. And if I fall? Too much.

Question, after question. I can live it at questions right now. More excited. Better than stating completely in one reality, without the space of much flexibility or improvement. Like water. That's nice and scary. Like water.

The scary part of putting oneself. At least for me. Afraid of judgment, coming out naive or simply not interesting "enough." It comes from the desire of being accepted, connected to all, from the same place why I wanted to create this project about this certain division that it is so obvious and painful in different scenarios to different people. By one opening up, you let in all. Sometimes it is "easier" to process pieces, one by one, spaces, I think that's ok. I think what it ends up being difficult is if one accepts that they truly are separate. They are not. There comes a time where one has to connect. And that connection will bring about something new, unknown. Which is the scary part. Scary part of feeling things one doesn't want to feel. Writing this was difficult. It is hard not to judge myself while writing, somehow I'm trying to look at this, write about this from a distance, honest but from a distance. Like if I were watching a movie about myself creating this project. What would that person write? What does she really want to do, write about? She's going to try something new and not overthink when she writes. And maybe it doesn't even have to be organized and have titles haha. That feels better.

A Concept That Keeps Growing:

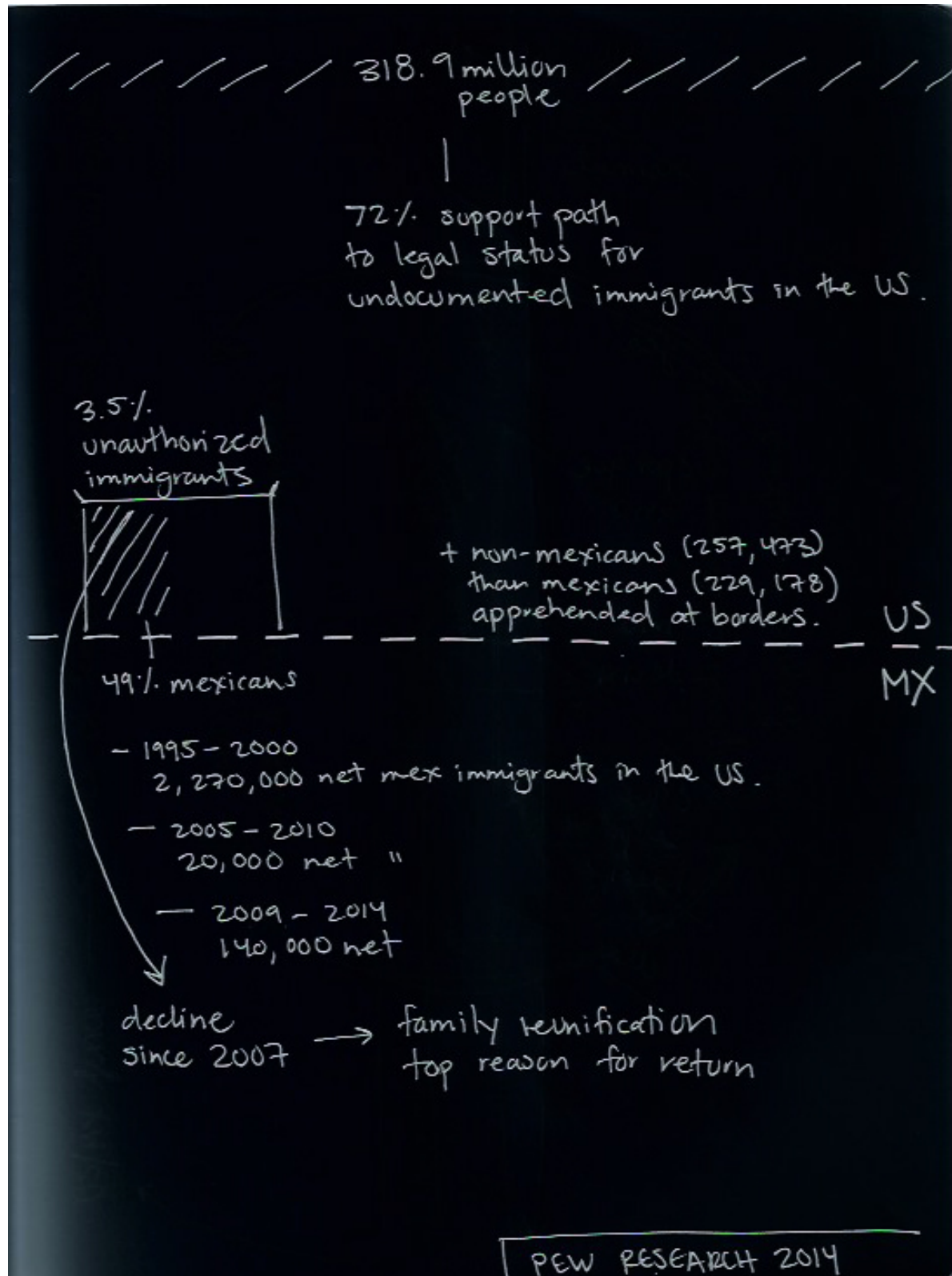
(Late April 2016)

A few months ago, I stated that this project is about manifesting a liminal state of being that I have created given my upbringing crossing back and forth both cities. And this is still true but now that I've experienced installing the piece in Tijuana and I'm preparing to install it in New York City, I see the piece as something else too. The piece has become to me about touching, experiencing a place where a bit of everything coexists. It is just not about manifesting it but is about how me through my work process, conversations I am making that space bigger and manifesting it not just through the art project but through all the activity surrounding the making of it. The process. It has also become about taking in an element that has weight and redefining it and introducing it to others as such. The element being the metal fence itself. This is purely personal and I believe it has happened due to the amount of energy and time I have spent with it. I don't like what the fence represents and functions as while at the same time it points out clearly to me how that fence and its "function" will not last. The fence itself is the manifestation of both places in one. The simple fact that the fence is owned by the US, but I can't get to it through the US, I can get through it from Mexico, touch it from Mexico. and the other side can't be seeing all the time what is happening on this fence. This fence divides and

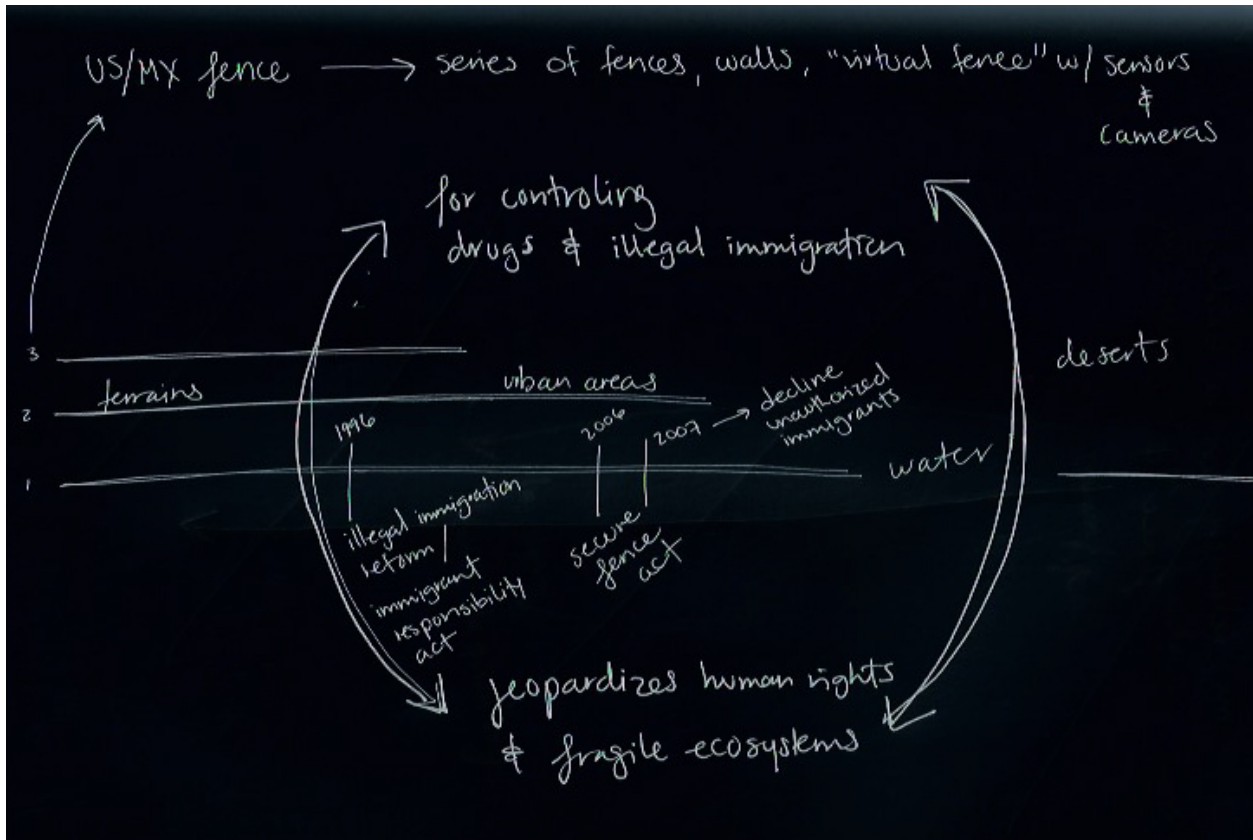
everything around it just because it cannot and will never be able to stop that connection between them brings people together. The fence is man-made, the fence has a time. The fence is a symptom of the fear and on its own it brings about both places because after all you cannot separate them. No one can.

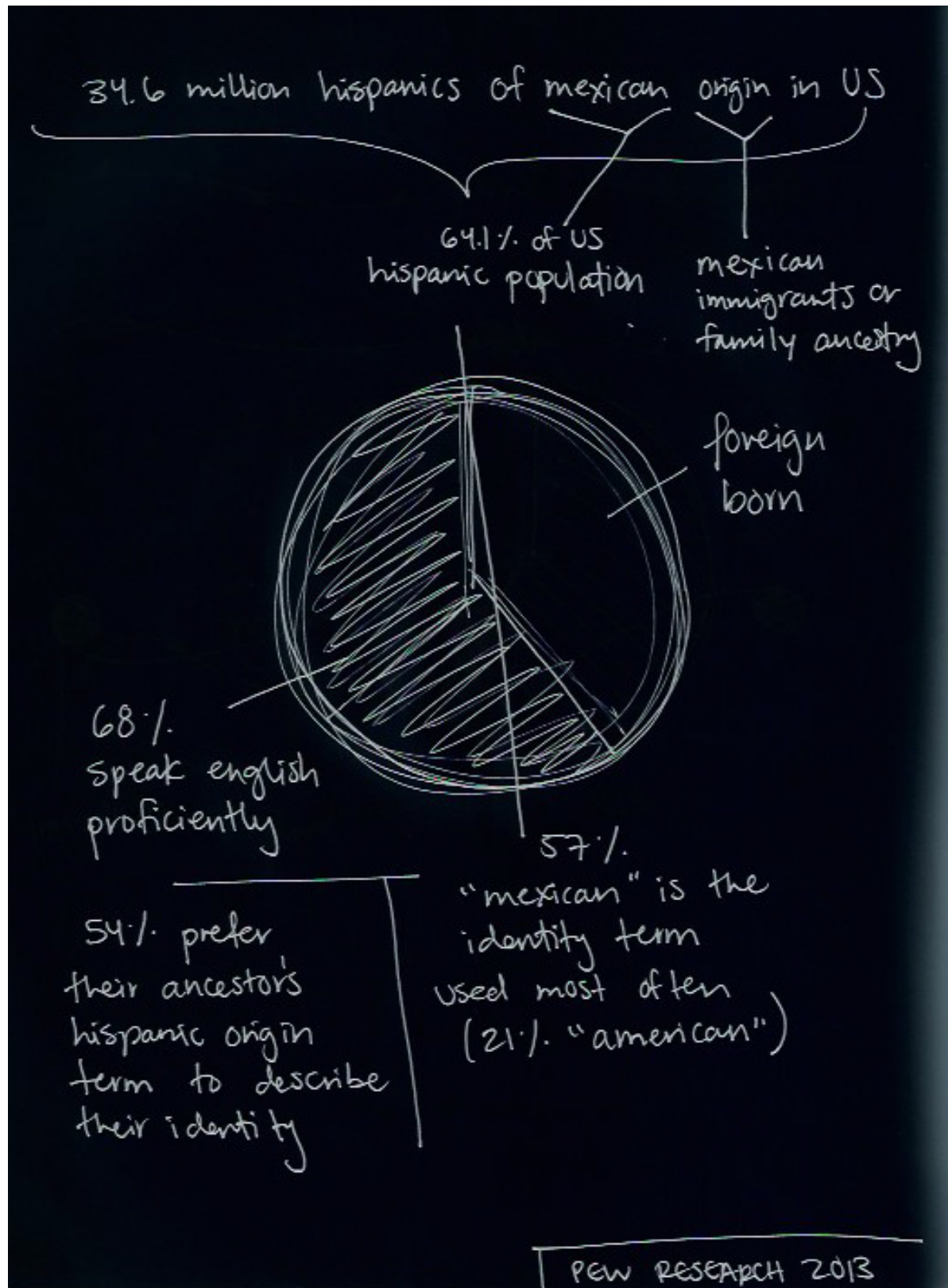
Drawings / Notes:

Mexican immigrants in the United States. Pew Research 2014.



Various points on the fence.





CHAPTER 4: EVALUATION / ANALYSIS



Video still at Tijuana's installation

My Fence:

Mi Barda

"Boundaries have a range of significance as limit-objects. Yet a boundary was once a material limit which marked 'the edge' beyond which civilization ceased to exist, or beyond which sailing ships did not return, and perhaps even 'fell off' the world. The terror of these absolute limit-boundaries persists in the popular imaginary."²⁸ When I was a child in Tijuana, I knew the political fence did not mark the end of the world, but it marked the space where I was not welcomed. In order to get in, I needed to smile and accurately respond to any questions from the border guards. There was a certain feeling of inferiority when one is lining up to cross and sees American officers arresting and talking down to people that are coming from the same side. "Boundary drawing is a matter of deciding on what or where is included and what is excluded. It is an aspect of relations, aesthetic reason and a form of judgment and discrimination or distinction."²⁹

Touching the fence through the transducers helped me make peace with these memories. Instead of feeling resentment or anger, I felt inspired and capable of redefining it. I felt I was physically and emotionally connected to it, sharing my breath with it. I enjoyed the process, though this fence is not meant to be enjoyed, touched, interacted with or changed. On the contrary, this fence is designed to stop human flow, natural growth, and connection. During the process of building the barriers, "The Secretary [of Homeland Security] waived a number of mostly environmental and conservation laws."³⁰ The urgency to "secure" this border was so great that it did not matter that it was overstepping laws meant to protect nature.

At the same time, I sensed that this fence was welcoming and embracing me and the equipment I was bringing. This fence that "had been built out of recycled portable helicopter landing mats that the United States used in Vietnam"³¹ was asking for a change, and with help from the speakers it came alive as something different than it was before. The way I see it, this material was born out of fear, not functionality, and needed redefinition.

I did not think I was going to end up giving thanks to the fence. Our relationship has been changing throughout and it still does constantly. It represents and supports fear, at the same time the fence embodies two opposites, two contradictions that co-exist in the fence. These two are not two anymore, but one, and that is how I end up

²⁸ Shields

²⁹ Shields

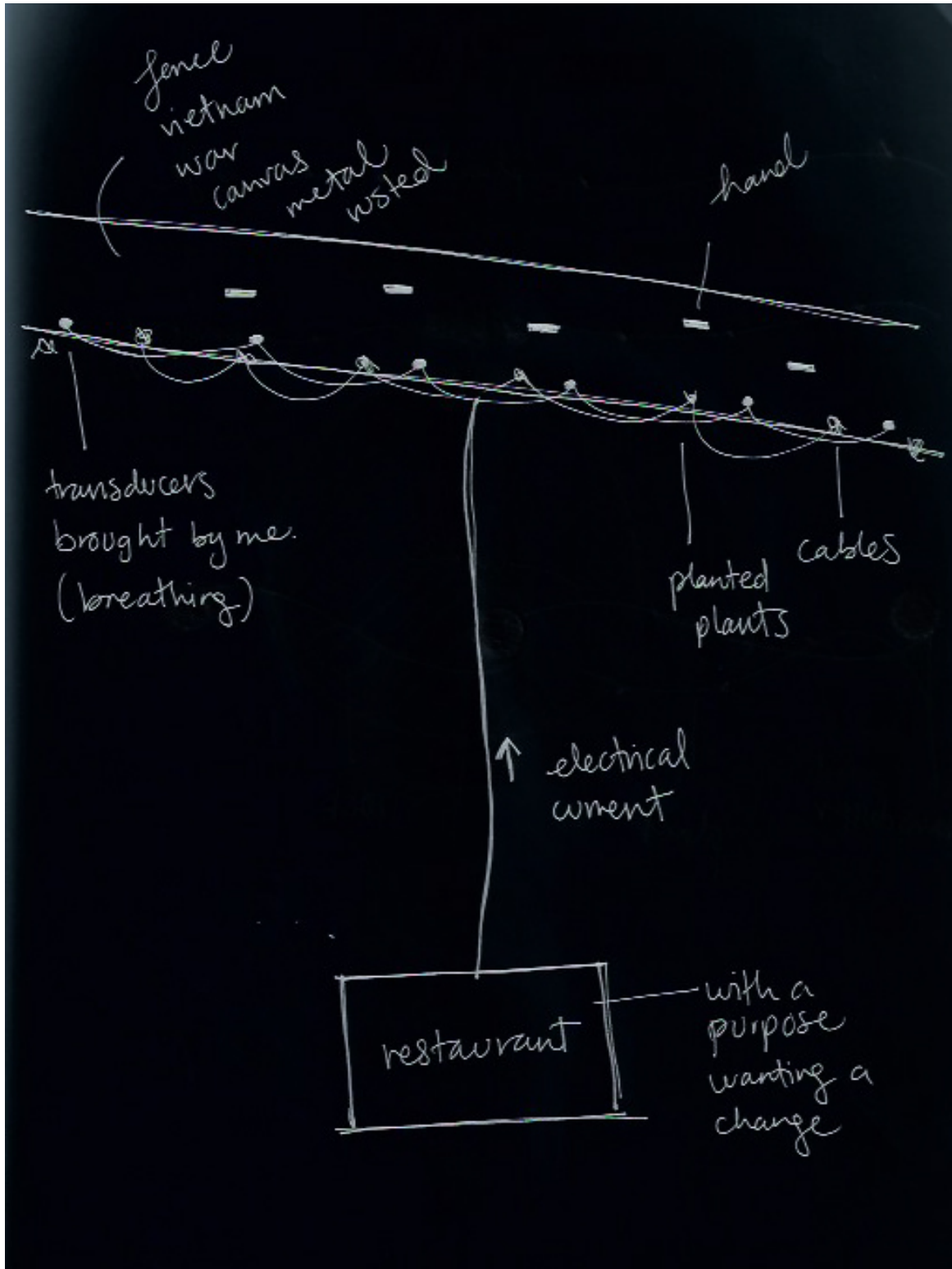
³⁰ Blas

³¹ Hattam

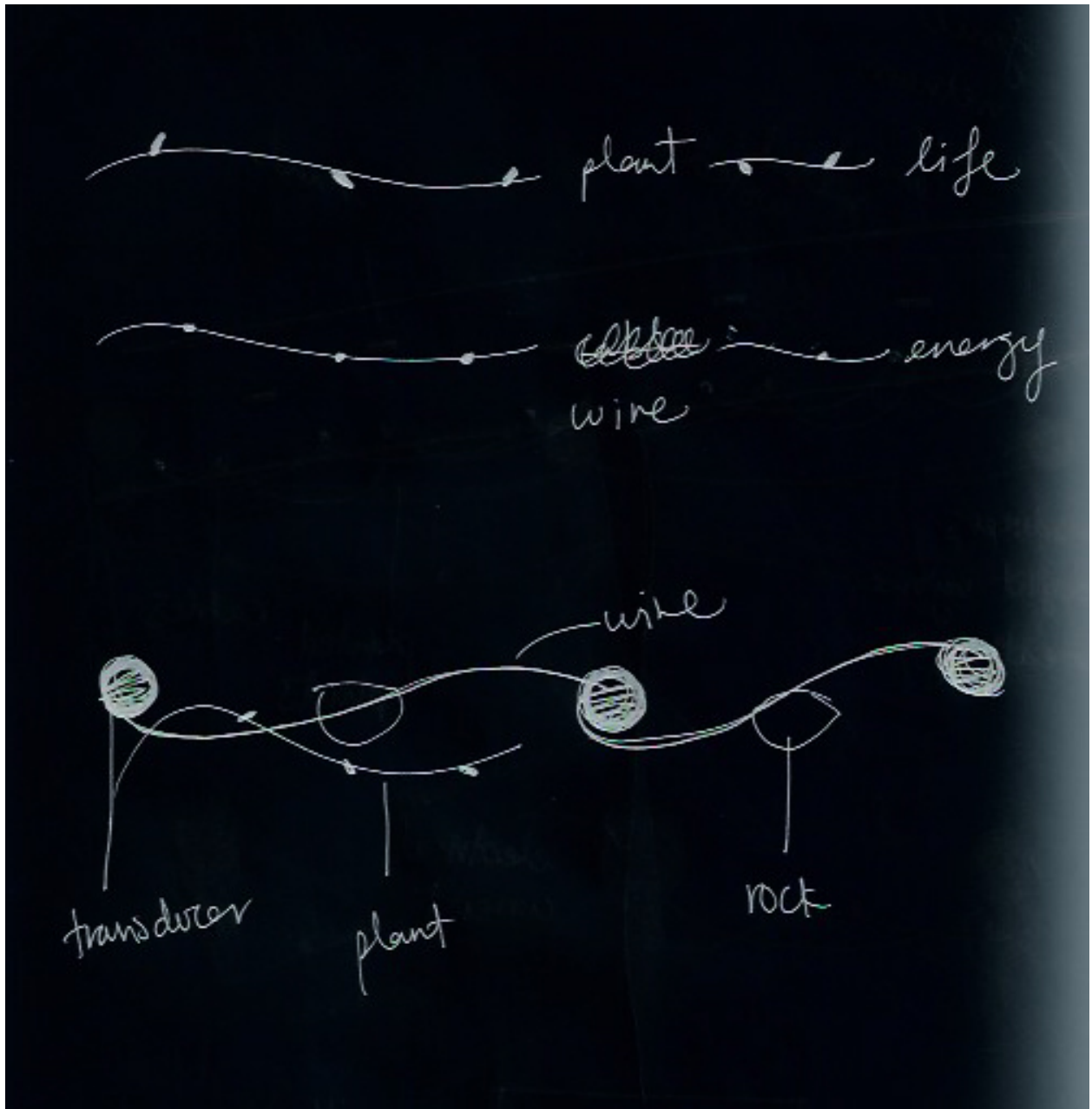
looking at the fence with more possibility than fear. It points to the potential of two opposites co-existing in one space. How great would it be to be in that space, to touch, hear, smell, taste that space. That is where my mind is on both a personal and artistic level. Since the project's essence is change itself, my reflections are constantly in flux. That is the beauty of this work and what I seek to point out. How does one point out the beauty in something that is constantly changing and at times scary?

Drawings / Notes:

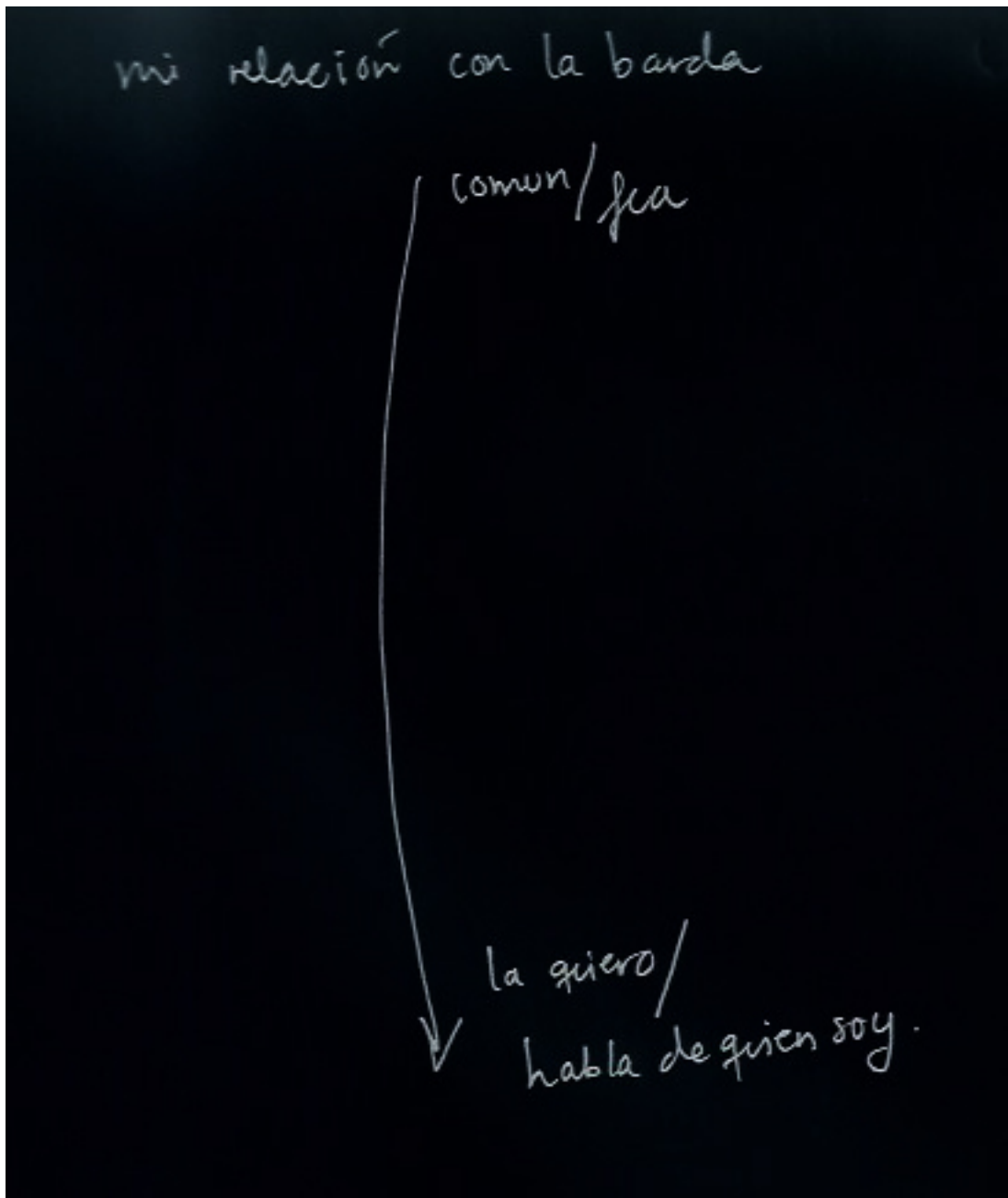
Layers of technology, nature and history.



Nature and technology.



My relationship with the fence.



Installation at Tijuana:

Before installation

During January 2016, I tested the equipment on the fence and got to know the people living and working nearby. At first, I was intimidated by the residents because I was doing work related to the space that they know very well. I was also afraid of police bothering me and trying to scare me out of being there. I had nothing to be afraid of. Everyone was welcoming and supportive. The people shared stories with me and everyone had their own unique perspectives on the fence. I thought everyone was going to tell me that they hated the fence, but I actually received a wide range of responses. Some people were indifferent to it and ignore it, some said it is degrading and one person that lived in the US for a while said that the US has the right to put up the fence. These interactions reminded me of how easy it is to assume someone else's perspective, even when it comes to something or someone that you think you know well. I was enriched by this experience of talking to the residents and realized just how complex and rich the border is. It is a point that allows different perspectives to be expressed, and there is so much to explore about human relations in its context. During the two days I was there, the police drove by twice and on one occasion stopped to talk to me. They asked me what I was doing, one of them joked about me trying to blow up the fence and the other one offered help. When I went back in April to install the final project it felt good being back. It was now a known, comfortable space.



Video still



You can place one there,

Video still



We would sell food to the people crossing.

Video still



Video still



Video still



Video still



Video still

Equipment In-Site

The garbage, its smell, feces, street dogs, dying plants, seafood, quiet friendly neighbors and airplanes flying every so often. This was the setting for the installation that became apparent while installing. The setting prompted the question of what it means when artwork is taken out of its context and is in constant connection with its surroundings. One is used to having electrical plugs, soft surfaces to work with and a space where one can arrange things however they want. This was not the case. I came in with my equipment and ideas and was in a constant intimate relationship with the space while trying to negotiate its limitations. We cleaned up dog droppings, planted new plants to hide the speakers and sanded the neglected fence in order to place the transducers. Therein lies another interesting relationship, the one between nature and technology. Due to the essence of my work, I am always trying to figure out how raw materials and technology can complement instead of cancel each other out. In this case, it was nice to notice the juxtaposition of wires and stems, transducers and plants.



Video still



Video still



Video still



Video still



Video still

While Installing

While I was placing the custom speakers and listening to them, there were two men in the background also listening by the fence. The difference was that they were not listening to the fence but through it. One of them was wearing what seemed to be headphones. In the video footage, both him and I can be seen simultaneously making the same gesture of listening. I believe he was listening for radio signals through the fence. I was listening to my breathing embedded on the fence. After a while, the police came by and told us that the men had jumped over, which is how I found out what they were doing. I was embarrassed to find out that they had jumped and that I was installing a project about the border. What had happened with those men spoke directly to the issues the border represents. To me, this disregard speaks to the challenge of creating effective public artwork. Since the work is constantly in relation to its surrounding, which is full of various perspectives and ways of being, one can see the juxtaposition of my own and the men's perspectives on how we see and behave with the same material and attached connotations.



Video still



Video still



Video still



Video still



Video still

Reactions

People's experience varied depending on their background and connection to the fence. Most of the people see the fence on a regular basis, so they were not impressed by what they were seeing. The challenge was to keep them engaged with the space by utilizing only the breathing sound. Some people immediately walked up to the custom speakers and walked by them all, while others took a little bit longer. It was interesting to see who they were and how they engaged with the fence when they were close to the speakers. Some would touch the fence and close their eyes, which was a reaction I was hoping for since I wanted to create acknowledgment of the fence and maybe even transform one's relationship to it. Everyone who lives there is used to seeing the fence, but hardly ever get close to it. The owner of a nearby restaurant suggested writing "I am breathing" on the fence, and a radio host mentioned "No one has ever made the fence exist, you are making it exist". These are examples of the range of responses I got while presenting the piece. This variety of perspectives is, for me, what is interesting and rich and what differs from a gallery or museum space experience.



Video still



Video still



Video still



Video still



Video still



Video still



Video still



Maybe our society doesn't accept it is there.

Video still



There is one that crossed in the trunk of a car.

Video still

CREDITS

Cory Ring – video camera and sound

Isabella Cruz-Chong – concept, technology, sound recording, Tijuana's installation

Joe Mault – NY installation

Ricardo Cruz-Chong – sound editor

Sam Keene – metal work, NY installation

Tyler Henry – NY installation

Ximena A. Cuenca – video editor

SPECIAL THANKS TO

Adrian Coto

Anezka Sebek

Ernesto Klar

Gabriela Cortes (Angeles de la Frontera)

Henry J. Lam

Kate Sicchio

Maria I. Chong

Maria Krekeler

Marietta Villalba

Restaurante Huahuis

Rodolfo Cruz

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Selasi, Taiye. "Don't ask where I'm from, ask where I'm a local" TedGlobal 2014. October 2014
2. Miller, BJ. "What really matters at the end of life" TED2015. March 2015
3. Ratey, John J. *A User's Guide to the Brain: Perception, Attention, and the Four Theaters of the Brain*. Vintage. 2002. Paperback
4. Pallasma, Juhani. *The Eyes of the Skin, Architecture and the Senses*. Wiley. 2005. Hardcover
5. Herkenhoff, Paulo. "The Hand and the Glove." *Inverted Utopias*. Museum of Fine Arts Houston. 2004. Paperback
6. Brett, Guy. "Lygia Clark: In search of the body." *Art in America*. Research Library. 1994.
7. Pasternak, Anne. "Foreword". *Living as Form, Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011*. The MIT Press. 2012
8. Alys, Francis. "On When Faith Moves Mountains". *Situation*. The MIT Press. 2009
9. Pollock, David & Van Reken, Ruth. *Third Culture Kids*. Nicholas Brealey Publishing. 2010
10. Szokolczai, Arpad. *Breaking Boundaries, Varieties of Liminality*. Berghahn. 2015.
11. Horvarth, Thomassen, Wydra. *Breaking Boundaries, Varieties of Liminality*. Berghahn. 2015.
12. Giesen, Bernhard. *Breaking Boundaries, Varieties of Liminality*. Berghahn. 2015.
13. Godard, Jean-Luc, dir. *Alphaville*. Athos Films. 1965. Film.
14. Gondry, Michel, dir. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. Focus Features. 2004. Film.
15. Del Toro, Guillermo, dir. *El Laberinto del Fauno*. Estudios Picasso. 2006. Film.

16. Amenábar, Alejandro, dir. *Mar Adentro*. Sogepaq. 2004. Film.
17. Sophocles edited by David Grene and Richmond Lattimore. Third Edition, edited by Mark Griffith and Glenn W. Most. *Sophocles II*. The University of Chicago Press. 2013.
18. Baldwin, James. *Giovanni's Room*. Vintage. 2013.
19. Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. Vintage Contemporaries. 2001.
20. Mendieta, Ana. *Siluetas* series. 1976. Chromogenic Print. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.
21. Malksoo, Maria. *Breaking Boundaries, Varieties of Liminality*. Berghahn. 2015.
22. Hattam, Victoria. *Imperial Designs: Remembering Vietnam at the US–Mexico Border Wall*. 2016.
23. Shields, Rob. *Boundary–Thinking in Theories of the Present*. 2003
24. Nuñez–Neto, Blas. Garcia, Michael John. *Border Security: The San Diego Fence*. 2007