Sustenance

A Play for All
Trans [ ] Borders

Electronic Disturbance Theater/b.a.n.g. lab
Chorus establishes the shot:
**TRANSITION**
*(song of my cells)*

Gloria Anzaldúa writes, "We have a tradition of migration, a tradition of long walks. Today we are witnessing la migración de los pueblos mexicanos, the return odyssey to the historical/mythological Aztlán" (1999 [1987]: 33). The historical? The mythological? Aztlán? It's difficult to follow the soundings of that song. Today's borders and circuits speak at "lower frequencies," are "shot through with chips of Messianic time." Might (Ochondria!): imagine the chips' transliteralization and you have "arrived" at the engines of a global positioning system—the transitivity of the Transborder Immigrant Tool. Too: when you outgrow that definition, look for the "trans-" of transcendental -isms, imperfect as overwound pocketwatches, "off"-beat as subliminalities (alternate forms of energy which exceed Reason's predetermined star maps). Pointedly past Walden-pondering, el otro lado de flànecer-flounderings—draw a circle, now "irse por la tangente"—neither gray nor grey (nor black-and-white). Arco-iris: flight, a fight. Of fancy. This Bridge Called my Back, my heart, my head, my cock, my cunt, my tunnel. Vision: You. Are. Crossing. Into. Me.

Let-Down [La Difunta Correa]: The Argentinean popular saint, La Difunta Correa, has yet to be canonized by the Catholic Church. Like Jesus Malverde, she resides in the hearts and minds of would-be border-crossers. Legend has it that she set off to find her husband with an infant in tow; but, crossing the desert, she died of dehydration. Those who found her body also found her son, miraculously still alive, his mouth latched to her breast. Entertain for a moment the baroque iconography of a corpse, one breast exposed, nursing an infant.

Most women who have nursed are intimately familiar with the phenomenon of let-down. Your child cries, your breast responds, lactating to the call. Edited out of this narrative is the sheer magnanimity of the breast: in a grocery store, an infant wails, you let-down—no matter that s/he is not your own. To veer dangerously toward an essentialist narrative the body knows and responds to distress in manners that exceed fight-or-flight dialectics. To cross technologies of gender, race, sexuality, nation, religion, class: imagine caching water in the Mexican-U.S. borderlands' "season of dying" as a comparable act of spontaneous release—not as a political statement (or not only that), but as a corporeal reflex, as an intuitive ethical gestus to insist, "not on my watch"?

Neither mixing nor nixing metaphors, one must concede that "enabling, enticing, aiding, abetting" (the worst case scenario spins on water-caching) are more complicated "acts of transfer" than this. Framing water-caching in terms of let-down amounts to a refusal to recount the borderlands' competing and accreting essentialisms, a U.S.-based "privilege of unknowing" the escalating numbers of a continental humanitarian crisis.
It is difficult to procure accurate body counts, but the Customs and Border Protection Agency’s 2009 fiscal year report documents 416 border-crossing related deaths from January to October 2009 (add to that 390 in all of 2008, 398 in 2007…). When the Berlin Wall fell, official reports claimed that ninety-eight people died trying to cross from East to West Berlin, while advocacy groups registered the number as exceeding 200. In contrast, humanitarian aid organizations like the Border Angels of San Diego/Tijuana estimate that 10,000 people to date have perished attempting to cross the Mexico-U.S. border (never mind those who’ve died crossing Mexico).

How does one convey the magnitude of these escalating death tolls? How does one repurpose language, technology, activism to respond to the habitat fragmentation that national borders continue to “perform or else” at the beginnings of the twenty-first century? How does one account for a longitudinal lack of accountability, that risks everything for square one?

The radical translucencies of TBT seek to shift locative media from its urban foundations of the law. Gilles Deleuze writes, “Hume’s empiricism is a sort of science-fiction universe avant la lettre. As in science fiction, one has the impression of a fictive foreign world, seen by other creatures, but also the presentiment that this world is already ours, and those creatures, ourselves.”

The Chorus code-switches:

**Zwischenspiel (Lied meiner Zeilen)**


The performance of newer phones equals any GPS designed for back country navigation, and their used prices are falling. Moreover, GPS itself does not require service and has free global coverage, courtesy of the United States government. In an emergency scenario, we would trust these later mobiles to target direct a lost person to a nearby safety site.

**Becoming Trans [ ] real:** A transversal line at the core of TBT rejects the will to purity. TBT tests the limits of the ethical and social principles at the foundations of the law. Gilles Deleuze writes, “Hume’s empiricism is a sort of science-fiction universe avant la lettre. As in science fiction, one has the impression of a fictive foreign world, seen by other creatures, but also the presentiment that this world is already ours, and those creatures, ourselves.” The radical translucencies of TBT seek to shift locative media from its urban grid experience to a winding dusty desert road. TBT emerges from logics of worlds’ colliding, erupting, multiplying, merging.

Unlike Alain Badiou’s claim that “there are only bodies and languages, except that there are truths,” which imposes the purity of the imagined laws of mathematics onto all bodies and lands, TBT acknowledges that truths are in bodies and languages, in the movement and growth of flesh in transition. As Deleuze writes, “there is something wild and powerful in this transcendental empiricism.” In the chaotic messiness of becomings and migrations from one state of being to another, from one body to another,
from one label to another, of the body and the land coming together into a
single motion of walking, TBT can be found, nourishing transitions like desert
flowers in the spring.

Transcendental -isms (¡Tierra y Libertad!):
Mid-nineteenth century,
in an essay alternately titled “Civil Disobedience” and “Resistance to
Civil Government,” Henry David Thoreau wrote, “Let your life be a
counter friction to stop the machine.” He was, of course, referring to the
well-oiled machinery of the state,
and its bedfellow capitalism, as
each related at that time to the U.S.
reterritorialization of Texas and the
globally inflected (ideological) state
apparatus, otherwise known as
slavery.

Thoreau’s call for
informed dissent, squarely tied to
transcendental -isms, infuses the
landscape, “la tierra,” with the very
Chorus emanates:
TRAN S I T I V IT Y:
Teths and objects— never free­
standing—beholden to volition’s liminality. An
ethics of cause­and­effect causes affect, i.e., for
every action, a fearful symmetry: the agent, her
“recipient,” and a verb’s bridging trouble the waters
of a sovereignty supreme. Hobbes’ Leviathan—the
social contracts—post­neoliberal as whiplash.
Transient beings rise, ride the tide, bring tidings of
a brow furrowed, wide. Widening the gap between
have-knots and have-nots—a fearful asymmetry—in
1902, Conrad stole, or borrowed, or sold (mind you,
the difference’s perspectival as painting) Bolívar’s
line: “governing Spanish American republics is like
plowing the sea.” Almost a century late, Hardt &
Negri: “The forms in which corruption appears are
so numerous that trying to list them is like pouring
the sea into a teacup.” This, we insist, is transitivity,
transcendental –isms view the occasion of the border as
transitive
, as
more than the matter of linguistic slippage, as less
than the lumpen sum of democracy’s lubricants.

Moreover,
place
in Thoreau’s formulations (and in those of the
Zapatistas) cups like a candle civil disobedience’s appeals to a “higher law
doctrine.” For, just as Martin Luther King, Jr. claims, “an unjust law is no law,”
Thoreau performatively insists, “This people must cease to hold slaves,
and to make war on Mexico, though it cost them their existence as a people.”
Promoting that one must stand one’s ground—Thoreau cognitively maps
walking as practice, as a tool for ethical survival. Similarly, we recognize
the legitimacy of walking, of would-be-crossers’ continental philosophy (an
appeal to the “higher law” of the Americas, a becoming-minor transcendental
–ism).

The “politics of the question” here amounts to a latitudinal
attunement, an auto-interpellation into “the song of the nonaligned world,”
which both registers and resists the U.S.-Mexico border’s implicit land art
aspirations. Envision the dividing line (apprehensible aerially) in the words of

Chorus emanates:
TRAN S I T I V IT Y: a linguistic continuum
of feeling. Subjects plus objects—never free­
standing—beholden to volition’s liminality. An
ethics of cause-and-effect causes affect, i.e., for
every action, a fearful symmetry: the agent, her
“recipient,” and a verb’s bridging trouble the waters
of a sovereignty supreme. Hobbes’ Leviathan—the
social contracts—post-neoliberal as whiplash.
Transient beings rise, ride the tide, bring tidings of
a brow furrowed, wide. Widening the gap between
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transcendental –isms view the occasion of the border as transitive, as
more than the matter of linguistic slippage, as less
than the lumpen sum of democracy’s lubricants.
Mary Pat Brady, as a “state-sponsored aesthetic project,” times two, three, four…

**Trans [ ] infinities dancing on the void:** e-vents arrive on dove’s feet, they surprise us in the moment of greatest silence, e-vents a-void the void of the [empty set] by engendering parallel universes that call on us to “share the labor” of what is to be done without Infinity. All locative situations echo back the alphæh [ ], the empty brackets, like rattling handcuffs that become state-sanctioned attempts to contain infinities, to lockdown the set [ ] and throw away the key. TBT exceeds the singularity of Infinity by overflowing the set, by naming the pluralized trans [ ] infinities that never relinquish what borders subtract—the logics of an aberrant ethics=aesthetics that walks within and alongside us *sin nombre*.

**Trans [ ] walking into the sacred:** In *The Devil’s Highway: A True Story*, Luis Alberto Urrea enumerates the seemingly irreconcilable distance between walking as art/philosophy and walking as migratory necessity at the twenty-first century’s crossroads of labor, location, subjectivity, subjugation. He writes, “Most walkers die a relatively short distance from salvation … After a day of baking in the sun, they start to get disoriented. They drink too much water. They’re dizzy and weak. By the second or third days, when they need their wits and strength about them, they are near death. And they drop, often reported with sad irony in the press, a few miles, or yards, or feet, from water, a home, a road, or a Border Patrol outpost.”

Recalling prior waves of border cultural production, we emphasize alternative aesthetics for the Mexican-U.S. borderlands (and beyond). On the one hand, the performative matrix of TBT functions as an efficacious, wholeheartedly inefficient poem-in-motion, as an earthwork to interrupt discourses which, ensconced in their own design of market-oriented-transparency meet military-industrial-complex, reduce the would-be

**A Prisoner of Love whispers from a cell [w]hole:** Jean Genet sought to summon what the vision machine doesn’t see—the blind spots that produce systemic reverse hallucinations. If a hallucination is seeing what is not there, then a

Jacques Rancière, “The real must be fictionalized in order to be thought.” Plagiarize utopia! *Let your life be a counter fiction to stop the machine.*

**Becoming Trans [ ] real [Mud Magic]:** The radical translucencies of TBT are akin to the “becoming worldly” of Donna Haraway, whose “queer messmates in mortal play,” “make a mess out of categories in the making of kin and kind.” As Haraway states, “I am a creature of the mud.” Ironically, Haraway’s mud was written as a critique of Deleuze’s forgotten quotidian, but her mud brings us back, by way of Deleuze, to the question of purity. Because it is in Haraway’s close relationship with the mud, squeezing it through her fingers, that she encounters the *Otherworldly*, just as in the flesh of the human body, when she writes, “human genomes can be found in only about 10 percent of all the cells that occupy the mundane space I call my body; the other 90 percent of the cells are filled with the genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such… to be one is always to become with many.” Haraway undermines the myth of the purity of the body as something that can be conceived with any simple, singular identity. She reveals the Whitmanesque porous borders of our flesh, the transborder migrations of bacteria which keep alive our bodies, our ecosystems. Her investigations illuminate not a simple empiricism of reactionary judgments, but eminent domains, vast planes of immanence.

**Chorus constellates:**

- **DA/SEIN**
  - All along—
  - the watch—
  - *Tower.*

- **BE/TWEEN**
  - The distance:
  - *i*

**Chorus positions:**

- Codo a codo, codo a coda: entre el difunto correo

- **ESTAMOS**

- y la Difunta Correa.
reverse hallucination is not seeing what is there. Genet calls on us to conjure spaces for traumatic myths that could manifest spontaneous simulations capable of haunting power’s post-spectacles. His texts hail us to spook the simulacra of the visual with simulations of the small unseen gestures being made by those who suddenly could rally empathy beyond the screen. The digital here adds the possibility of a speed of production and distribution almost as fast as that of dreams. An actor/audience network quickly can develop a dialogue, a design, a meme, and an outcome that builds small waves of visibility. Minor simulations of the unseen must focus on those tricky passages, nonlocations where spectacle networks transgress their own limits. Any performance must be a simulation of what is not apprehended—the truth of e-vents, “enabling fictions,” second-lives that hit the ground. Genet attempted an ethics for a politics of simulation, affirming an aesthetics of the false[tto] for fragile voices. TBT, translating tangentially Genet’s alchemy, shortles from the balcony, TODOS SOMOS ARIZONA.

Trans [ ] borders: Oppose the political and aesthetic possibilities of interpellation and constellation. Judith Butler’s introductory remarks in Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative, like many regarding hate speech, implicitly remain attached to a paradoxical insularity of the subject. Conterminously, Butler’s “performative utterances” excuse or obscure what Coco Fusco names “the other history of intercultural performance”—what we might approach as the “aesthetics” of hate speech—in favor of a focus on the latter’s politics. What would it mean to insist upon the artistry of such epistolary dramas may be, they rely upon the intertwined performativities of language, subjectivity (individual and collective), and geography. At junctures, they rehearse a selective racist memory ballooning out into the histrionics of History (with the capital punishment of an upper-crusted “H”). And, at still other junctures, they dispense a “New World Border” remix, the “paradigmatic drama” of Eve meets Malinch.

Put a flower in a gun and call it a win-win Situationalism. These incendiary messages (and their authors)—like so many posts and blogs against EDT and TBT—certainly could be seen as harboring intentions to interpellate their recipients (us!) insofar as they feebly hail our supposed vulnerabilities as raced, gendered, trans/sexual(ized) subjects, what one post neatly summed up as our collaborative ability to represent “all the perversions.” But, simultaneously, these messages constellate into remarkable patterns, cognitive star maps whose coordinates demonstrate the larger contested “aesthetics” of immigration policy and debate, of the Americas’ elongated isthmus (where to place the accent on aesthetics versus politics amounts to a dislocation of activism’s lengthy implicit shouldering of the burden of alter-representation).

representatives who voted for health care legislation. However inept the artistry of such epistolary dramas may be, they rely upon the intertwined performativities of language, subjectivity (individual and collective), and geography. At junctures, they rehearse selective racist memory ballooning out into the histrionics of History (with the capital punishment of an upper-crusted “H”). And, at still other junctures, they dispense a “New World Border” remix, the “paradigmatic drama” of Eve meets Malinch.

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of several women poets, “We’d pair chronicle their informal survey simply-number-crunching close, the publishing. At their article’s far-from-on the current state of poetry and Spahr and Stephanie Young reflect In “Numbers Trouble,” Juliana of “el difunto correo”/the dead letter). shorthand these positions as the alibi inefficacies (for argument’s sake, let’s bemoan the dearth, if not the death, “lettered city” is dead. Others maintain that the Latin American Let-Down [el difunto correo]: Many most! and neoliberal administrations fear accomplished what the atavistic right focus on very particular problems. The outdoor GPS devices from Garmin and Magellan are indeed useful aids for the long distance overland orienteering required to walk into the United States. Readily available at Wal-Mart and Best Buy in Mexico, they have been utilized for a long time in border crossings. In other words, capitalism long ago accomplished what the atavistic right and neoliberal administrations fear most!

Let-Down [el difunto correo]: Many maintain that the Latin American “lettered city” is dead. Others bemoan the death, if not the death, of authorship, of the aesthetic’s inefficacies (for argument’s sake, let’s shorthand these positions as the alibi of “el difunto correo”/the dead letter). In “Numbers Trouble,” Juliana Spahr and Stephanie Young reflect on the current state of poetry and publishing. At their article’s far-from-simply-number-crunching close, the pair chronicle their informal survey of several women poets, “We’d be curious if you could imagine some way that poetry, or poetry communities (again, however you define the terms) might do more to engage the living and working conditions of women in a national/international arena.” Transcribing some of the responses they received, they go on to leave the ball in the reader’s court.

Consider TBT to be our humble response to Spahr and Young’s call. Arriving at a moment when a generation of poets, artists, and activists are repeating questions about the possibilities of social engagement in what’s shaping up to be the era of the proliferating post- (post-post-modern, post-post-colonial, post-neoliberal, et cetera), TBT queries, “What constitutes sustenance?”

Attempting to undocument (per the conceit of Rosa Alcalá’s Undocumentables) the de facto fact-driven aesthetics of policy-minded and social scientific representations of the U.S.-Mexico border, and indeed, of what Teddy Cruz identifies as the global “necklace of conflict,” TBT echo-relocates Roberto Bolaño’s planetary, “salvage (versus savage) detective” guarantee, “todos somos emigrantes, emigrantes del Espíritu.” Refugees of the Hegelian spirit, no doubt! Like Kojin Karantani in Transcritique, we seek asylum, “a space of transcodings between the domains of ethics and political economy, between the Kantian critique and the Marxian critique” wherein we aspire to base materialities of language.

Phase 1: With twenty-twenty hindsight, we identify the viral reportage on TBT as the first instance of the latter’s deployment (a contagion). Phase 2: This is how TBT’s aesthetic, a poetics of dislocation, unfolds to queer the Nation’s concretude… Often—rightly enough—conversations about crossing the Mexico-U.S. border refer to disorientation, sun exposure, dehydration. TBT both aspires to address those vicissitudes and to remember that the aesthetic, too, sustains.

Revalence the acronym GPS in the vein of Laura Borràs Castanyer and Juan B. Gutiérrez’s efforts to imagine a “global poetic system.” The location of the poetic in the Transborder Immigrant Tool, a dislocation, is not in the particular poems uploaded onto the cell phones (each one, “a long cool drink” for some readers/listeners; “muddy water” for others). In the vast “desert of the real” known as public culture, we tend to favor accounts of La Difunta Correa over those of “el difunto correo” (although we realize...
that we’ve got our work cut out for us on the ground and above). For now, channel the contours of an (electronic) civil disobedience, wayward as a waking dream:

*Hum.* In March 2010, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security announced that the virtual portion of the separation barrier erected along the U.S.-Mexico border thus far had proven ineffective, manifesting numerous technical glitches (notably, a hyper-vigilant inability to distinguish among wind, sage brush, and human beings). (Adrian-)Piperian “food for the spirit”—did an aesthetic unconscious will the fence’s malfunction? Wabbit trans/nation? Mayan meets queer technologies? “Earth Telephone”? Sleep Dealer’s nod to node-to-node resistance? It’s your turn to try to circumvent borders with this “true story”—the borders falsely constructed between the university, the gallery, the museum, the library… and the “real world.”

*Becoming Fugitive* [“Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?”], an audible postscript [from off stage left]: The trans in transborder and transgender can signify a crossing, but also a hope and a bravery in crossing. As a trans person, I am familiar with the hope of crossing over to a new place, the place of a new body. I think that this is something I share with those who hope to find a better life by moving their bodies into a new place, across an international border. I know that many people cross daily in the hopes of becoming something or someone else, becoming a good parent, able to financially support their children, becoming a professional, or even becoming a self, free from gender-based oppression. In a way this hope is always a hope for the unknown; for the person can never know what the result of the crossing will be... a better life, a new body, death or injury. I imagine TBT as a gesture of transborder solidarity, one that might help prevent the needless deaths of those whose only crime is hope.

*(Stage lights come down to a pinpoint on a bottle of water that overflows, spilling beyond the light.)*

*Chorus raps parallel tracks, acknowledging its mounting debts (to Greece):*

**MITOXONAPIA**

Ἀρχαία μίτος, στιρινὸν +
Ἀρχαία χόνδρων (απὸ χόνδρος), σπορι, κόλκος.

Ἀπό τα σύννεφα, ανέβει η Βόρεια Αμερική, η ἐβδομή ακλωφή, μια θάλασσα, ένα φυτώριο, νήματα-πλεκτά-συντεταγμένες που πάνουν το φως σαν την σκόνη σαν τις στάχτες. Σε στάχτη (ένα «εσώ» και ένα «εγώ»): χώρα, ο χορός, το κοράλλι, μια μελλοντική ανακοίνωση που είναι:

*έως “αγάμος” ή “Αγώμας,”

ένα υποκοριστικό.

**MITOCHONDRIA**

Greek mitos, warp thread +
Greek khondron (of khondros), grain, granule.

From the clouds, North America ascends, the seventh sister, a sea, a seed-bed, threads—intertwined—coordinates that catch the light like the dust like the ashes. To ashes (a “you” and an “I”): khôra, the chorus, a reef, a relief to come that is like “agua” to “aguas,” a diminutive.

*No-Movie credits roll [an interior scroll]…*

**Electronic Disturbance Theater/b.a.n.g. lab [bang.calit2.net/xborder]:**
Ricardo Dominguez, Brett Stalbaum, Micha Cárdenas, Amy Sara Carroll, and Elle Mehrmand

**Play Directors:** Amy Sara Carroll and Ricardo Dominguez  
**Cultural Liaison:** Chanda L. Carey

**Poems:** Amy Sara Carroll  
**German translation:** Petra Kuppers  
**Greek translation:** Yanoula Athanassakis  
**Taiwanese translations:** Lili Hsieh/謝莉莉 and Zona Yi-Ping Tsou/鄭怡平
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