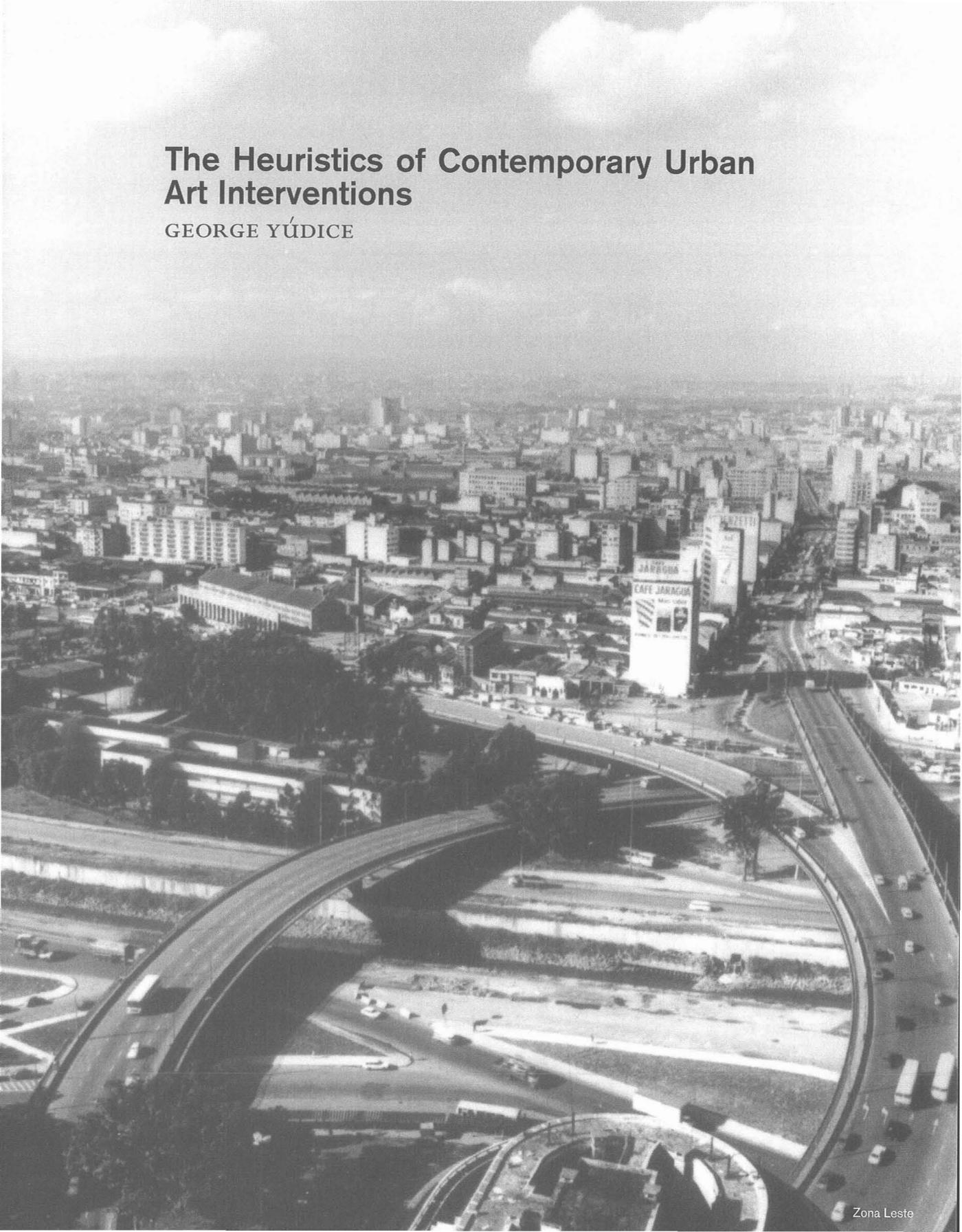


# The Heuristics of Contemporary Urban Art Interventions

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This essay focuses on public art intervention projects in the Americas that seek not only to discern, but even more importantly, to unleash a heuristic process that is both cognitive and phenomenological. These projects highlight the way in which power circulates, lodges in places, and pretends to be empowering. They seek to recognize the strategies for change that are made available in the sociability or interaction that ensues from participation in art interventions. The first project is *Arte/Cidade*, which means “Art City,” whose first four editions took place in São Paulo, but whose fifth is slated for an industrial infrastructural corridor between two major industrial cities northeast of São Paulo called Belo Horizonte, “Beautiful Horizon,” and Vitória, “Victory.” They are in a major mining region of Brazil. In fact, Belo Horizonte is in a state called Minas Gerais—which means “General Mines.” The Portuguese were very literal when they named their colonies. The second project is *inSITE*, which is now in its fifth edition. It takes place along the San Diego-Tijuana corridor for a stretch of about 130 kilometres. It used to call itself a tri-annual, but the last edition was in 2000 and the most recent one took place from August to November 2005, so it is now a five-year affair. It takes a long time to raise the money and get all the trappings to put it together.

These projects belong to a relatively new, albeit proliferating, genre of public art programs for which artists are commissioned to create new works, usually installations involving performance, film, and video developed over weeks and months (and sometimes even longer) in specific sites and in interaction with local publics (communities, institutions, and corporations). While these projects may not have yet attained the status of the biennales in Venice, Sydney, Johannesburg, and São Paulo—and art festivals like *Documenta*—they have been compared favorably to these larger venues, as well as to “younger art bashes such as the Korean Kwangju Biennial, the Münster Sculpture Projects, or the American SITE Santa Fe festivals” (Chattopadhyay 1997: 23).

They have in common the following characteristics: (1) they claim a special character for their particular places, ranging from the most traversed border in the world, in the case of *inSITE*, to the most inhospitable chaotic urbanscape, in the case of *Arte/Cidade*; (2) the curators invite a mix of local and foreign artists to get a sense of the place, often in workshops and tours, and then plan interventions that loosely carry out the theme set out in the curators’ mission statement; (3) artistically, as the programs evolve, they tend to move away from art works and installations to the catalyzing of interactions; (4) methodologically, the curators involve the artists in work that is akin to cartography and ethnography, as part of the preparation for the design of their interventions; (5) organizationally, the programs take years to put together and with the partial exception of *inSITE* are underfunded, a condition that both limits their reach with respect to their ambitions, but also fosters ingenuity; (6) additionally, in terms of organization it could be said that the complex negotiations undertaken by the directors and curators of

these programs are as significant in terms of the heuristic dimension. That is, the work done by organizers reveals as much or more as the art about the location and should, therefore, be seen as an intervention in its own right; (7) this insight suggests that it is the directors/curators who are the main protagonists: they have assumed a protagonist role in these events. They are the architects or planners, so to speak, who map out the agenda for what I sometimes characterize as flexible workers for hire, the artists, who in turn produce, or extract, mobilize, and activate; they extract cultural capital by processing a range of materials—the urban and regional scape—in particular, the specific asset of a site (i.e., the border in the case of *inSITE*, or the obsolescent industrial modernity of architecture and infrastructure in *Arte/Cidade* in São Paulo).

Directors and curators also activate and mobilize publics and communities, who in turn, invest their own *collaboration* in the success of these projects.<sup>1</sup> The social issues are transformed into art. Local cultures and international artistic trends constitute the two poles of the new international division of cultural labour.<sup>2</sup> We have an interesting relationship here between the curators and directors, the artists, the communities that collaborate, and perspectives on a new model of labour. These are, of course, the materials of contemporary art interventions. If artists can work with spaces and interactions among people, then one can consider that the projects overall—these long-term events—are themselves in their own right works of art. That is, if art has blurred into community and a set of other issues that are ethnographic, then the organization of these events and all that they reveal about a society are themselves akin to the art project.

Let me begin with *Arte/Cidade* because it is the project that takes as its point of departure, at least in the first phases in 1994, what Rosalind Krauss (1985) has called “sculpture in the expanded field,” referring to its relationships to architecture and landscape. The curator, Nelson Brissac Peixoto, in turn, sees those relationships as a dilution of the sculptural object to the benefit of the context. Brissac is a philosopher of aesthetics turned curator whose first book was on Walter Benjamin and his second (very logically) on the ruins of modern cities like New York. Subsequently, he wrote another book on São Paulo. His first significant curatorial project for *Arte/Cidade* was called “The City Without Windows,” for which he commissioned fifteen artists to conduct on-site installations and performances in an abandoned massive, nineteenth-century slaughterhouse in a semi-peripheral area of the city.<sup>3</sup> He was interested in the dense materiality of such structures, with their “thick brick walls and iron beams with closed doors and windows, exerting an oppressive weight.” He was even more interested in how vision is hindered by density and shadow, as if time sedimented into a kind of ontological impediment, which for him produced a felt experience of São Paulo that lurked in areas of the city that people no longer went to. There are many areas of the city that are abandoned except for squatters or drug addicts who might inhabit these places.



In “The City Without Windows,” artists took Brissac’s curatorial statement and elaborated on it materially. Carmela Gross, for example, mapped a grid of holes on the floor of one of the rooms to give a sense of the mechanism of control by the system of weights and measures that organize a slaughterhouse. Moreover, the holes in the floor echo the absent windows (the slaughterhouse’s windows had been closed or enclosed in the past), signaling that the only air available sinks into the ground.

José Resende, on the other hand, sought to reanimate the cranes, massive stone blocks, concrete slabs, and other materials that were still kept in the back yard, juxtaposing the action implied by these objects to the immobilizing weight of the interior. Visible from the street and from the inside through a grating, Resende’s piece was positioned between private and public space, alluding to the lively discussion on these issues in São Paulo as the area began to be revitalized. After the *Arte/Cidade* interventions, the slaughterhouse became the cinematheque of the area. Brissac has commented self-critically on this turn of events, with regard to the gentrifying potential that even critical art can facilitate.

While the event did expand the field of art intervention in Brazil, Brissac acknowledged that the slaughterhouse still served only as an expanded exhibition space. While it maintained the nature of the original space, it was not a white cube but a brick cube—there was still something abstract and ubiquitous about it. This kind of intervention could be conceived or carried out in almost any city, and his intention was to be specific to São Paulo.

The second *Arte/Cidade* project, also from 1994, is “The City and Its Fluxes.” If the first *Arte/Cidade*—the “City Without Windows”—was dedicated to urban density, to the dense materials of the structure, the second intervention captured the movement along the network of buildings, highways, streets, and overpasses in the historical and symbolic centre of São Paulo, the valley of Anhangabaú.

This was to be Brissac’s first attempt to map the city, in part because the spread out sites of his project covered an entire valley, with literally thousands of people moving through it. But the flat cartographic map was only a beginning of this attempt to grasp the flows of space, from the tops of skyscrapers to the ground, diagonally across the entire downtown area, including light reflecting from car windshields and myriad other invisible networks such as those of capital appreciation and depreciation that eluded the conventional *flâneur* who could not, for example, climb the side of buildings like a fly (some of the projects attempted to do that) or bounce across space like the frenetic chaos at rush hours. “The City and Its Fluxes” is the first work in which Brissac conceives of space as consisting of multiple intersecting scales—human, architectural, geological (a river runs underneath the valley), and financial (this project made use of the Central Bank’s building). Art interventions become Brissac’s way of “working with measures we can no longer handle.” He conceives of jumping across vectors and scales as a means of mapping “a city seen from the windows;” he says that “everything turns

outward, looks at the street, throws itself far away, these irradiating spaces exist as platforms for movement.”

Let me comment on only three of the twenty-two artists who made interventions in this area. The first one, Guto Lacaz, constructed an immense periscope measuring nine storeys high with mirrors two-and-a-half metres long on the façade of the Electric Company Building, allowing passersby on the street to see the exhibition on the top floor. Conversely, the visitor can from up high observe the movement of the street. As Brissac remarks, “The urban space is literally taken over by these huge tube systems which materialize a light wave...they establish visual communication between two different plans, an instantaneous traffic between different plans, changing the city’s horizon.” Aside from providing a means to jump scales, this device also alludes to the urban panoptics of security systems in all cities.

This re-dimensioning of space is echoed in a different form by Regina Silveira’s anamorphic design that traces the windows of the Electric Company Building onto the floor of the top storey. The effect is that of suppressing the floor of the lower storeys, as if opening an abyss in front of the observer so that only the façade seems to be visible, with all its windows all the way to the ground floor. The artist stated that her intention was to construct a virtual space that, for an eye placed in the perspectives’ converging point, would provide the illusion of a transparent abyss where one could see the windows of the floor and interior and adjacent storeys on the floor in which the work is located.

Another artist, Rubens Mano, created a huge photographic device on an urban scale. He installed two 12,000-watt search lights on either side of the viaduct that goes right through the middle of the valley. Each cylinder is placed on towers 12 metres high erected on the ground level of the valley so as to target the overpass at the height of the sidewalk. The search lights throw parallel beams of light over half a metre in diameter, which hit the flow of pedestrians perpendicularly. As pedestrians cross the beam of light, their silhouettes are immediately revealed as they freeze or disappear in movement.

*Arte/Cidade 3*, “The City and Its Stories” (1997, third edition), ups the ante once again, this time arranging the interventions along the trajectory of São Paulo’s western railway over five kilometres of the city’s now abandoned manufacturing area. Visitors board a train painted in supremacist designs by artist Ricardo Ribenboim—at the nineteenth-century railway station used to transport coffee, which was the source of wealth for elites in that period. The train was crucial for the transport of coffee and industrial materials from São Paulo, which was (and continues to be) the economic engine of Brazil and the largest economy in all of South America. Brissac used the train both to transport visitors and to emblemize the flow of capital. From the Luz Station visitors go to the Central Mill, built in 1949 to process over 450 thousand kilos of wheat per day. It is a complex that includes a six-storey building and twelve silos, which are now abandoned

and pock marked from the removal of equipment. The final stop is the vast 92-thousand-square-metre Matarazzo industrial complex, the epitome of São Paulo's industrial grandeur from the 1920s, eventually abandoned in the 1970s. There is a logic to the setting because São Paulo elites wanted it to be a major cultural capital and the largest business empire. (Matarazzo is the person who financed and initiated the São Paulo Biennial in 1950.) When the business collapsed in the 1970s, the owners ordered the demolition of nearly all of the existing buildings. The remains—a boiler building with furnaces and chimneys, a loading shed and two abandoned locomotives, numerous rusty pipes, and smoke tunnels—leave one with an impression similar to that of a Tarkovsky film.



In “The City and Its Stories” Brissac asks if it is possible to map a city and tell its history. But this expansive urban ruin does not allow an all-embracing point of view, making it difficult to locate oneself or intervene in a contained space. Taking his cue from Robert Smithson, Brissac approaches this site as the convergence of reconstruction and decrepitude, finding in it an allegory of a future, imagined in the 1920s, destined to decay before coming to fruition. While the memory of modernity seems irrepressible, there are traces of the present, of the squatters and drug addicts who inhabit the buildings. The five-kilometre stretch is literally a fault line that swallows the pretensions to modernity of a city that continues to build. Brissac calls it an “entropic architecture,” and the artists commissioned to intervene in these places conducted an ethnography of ruin and an archaeology of access into and connections outward to the city. The sites were prepared over a period of two years—catwalks laid over ruins that were only buttressed, and in the case of some of the projects, dressed up Cristo-like to give the entire complex a counterpoint of ruin, vegetation, and a set of reference points making visible various scales.

The effort that went into conceptualizing a way of intervening that would not transform the site into an exhibition space (which was Brissac's challenge after the other *Arte/Cidade* projects) led him to reflect on the work of Smithson, André, Morris, and Helzer. The result of this reflection was the expansion of the field of intervention to the entire megalopolis. Because there is no vision or narrative that can encompass the megalopolis, Brissac assumed that the project would transcend the exhibition impulse, the transformation of the city into a vast white cube. Instead, mapping could consist only of marking the ruptures and gaps. He writes:

The city is a marked out space compartmentalized by a grid of transport roads and functions, but a megalopolis engenders its opposite. Vacant plots, temporary occupations, immense mobile slums, express roads without stops, territories no longer bound by dwellings, labour, or capital, infinitely extending forms of space without points of reference such as the sea and the desert. Here everything is distributed in an enlarged field in a system of relationships of speed and slowness between non-constituted elements

according to compositions and permanent variation, heterogeneous and disparate elements which form fluid groups. (*Arte Cidade*, website)

*Arte/Cidade 3* was seen by critics as an unsuccessful project: too many of the artists remained as such, carrying out works that were installations or that echoed, in the best of cases, Smithson, André, and company. The one intervention that received almost universal acclaim was by Nelson Félix, who carved huge squares of concrete from one of the floors of the mill (sort of like what Gordon Matta-Clark might do with a building) and suspended them with steel wires a few centimeters above the ground of the lower floor, echoing destruction of the complex, but at the same time giving the space a form.

One of the most interesting critiques of this project refers to the disjuncture between Brissac's own intentions, text, and mapping, on the one hand, and the artists' works, on the other. Most artists went ahead and created their installations, such as dressing the train, without taking seriously enough the kind of mapping that Brissac wanted to achieve. There is a disjuncture here between the director, the architect of operations, and the actual execution. It took two years to prepare the buildings and two years to raise support, including from a construction company to help prepare the buildings. Yet even Nelson Félix's intervention, cutting out those squares of concrete, is a good example of the problematic disjuncture, as the artist's intention to intervene into the architecture does not necessarily engage with *Arte/Cidade 3*'s commitment to working at the level of the site's relationship to capital flows.

Let me briefly mention that Brissac's subsequent project, *Zona Leste*, "East Side" (of São Paulo), went beyond architecture and took on an entire district, about a hundred square hectares. This project went beyond the transition from art to architecture and initiated him in a more interventive practice: he set up an urban planning company, in which he invited Rem Koolhaas and other architects and planners to participate.

His fifth and most recent project, which he has been working on since 2003, is larger than a metropolis and comes closest to his goal to map the flows of capital and their effects on the built environment. Brissac's projects have progressed in scale and in the means of mapping space and the forces that shape it: from the slaughterhouse to the downtown area of São Paulo, from the five-kilometer industrial section to an entire district in *Zona Leste*. While the first three involved exclusively Brazilian artists, in the fourth he brought in people like Koolhaas, Wodiczko, and other non-Brazilian artists. In *Zona Leste* the interventions were more direct engagements with residents, such as in the favelas and other communities. The latest project aims to intervene in an area between two Brazilian states—a few hundred kilometers instead of just five. The site is larger than a megalopolis: a corridor that cuts across two Brazilian states joining the capital city of Belo Horizonte in Minas Gerais and Vitória, the capital of Espírito Santo. Brissac is now

seeking to capture the complex forces that link a set of localities on this corridor to global flows. He is looking at what is being produced in these areas and how these products flow to Europe, Africa, the United States, and Asia.



I would now like to move on to *inSITE*. As in Brissac's *Arte/Cidade* projects, the curators, artists, and interlocutors engaged in the workshops and conversations of *inSITE* have reflected considerably on the ways in which art maps the power differentials that traverse the San Diego-Tijuana corridor. In the planning stages of *inSITE* 2000, which is the fourth edition, the curators devised a set of conceptual axes—landscape traffic syntax—along which artists might work in collaboration. The resulting reconfiguration of space and the new knowledge of the two cities are seen by the curators as political acts that generate new cultural articulations. At the July 1999 residency, in which Brissac participated, as did I, a geographer named Aníbal Yáñez Chávez pointed out that space is not a void waiting to be filled, and that when seen as a laboratory, the San Diego-Tijuana region is a palimpsest of experiments that have been carried out. One can immediately think of the experiments that serve the interest, he continued, of the military and industrial complex located in San Diego. The experiments with surveillance devices and methods to stem the flow of undocumented workers across the border and those experiments beholden to the military foundations of San Diego have transformed the city into a leader in telecommunications, computer, and biotechnology industries. These experiments also extend to the other side of the border, where the knowledge generated is put to use in the assembly of new products for global markets. If analyzed in all its dimensions, then, the laboratory metaphor brings into view *inSITE*'s articulation of the maquiladora metaphor. These connections were not lost on some of the artists and reviewers of *inSITE*. For *inSITE* '97 Judith Barry created a video installation about the border—the terror and possibility of hidden surveillance—in which she focuses on the contradictions of labour exploitation and land use in the maquiladora zone in Tijuana. The collage sequences of the video reproduce, in so far that it is possible, an otherwise invisible geography materialized in the images of flows of capital and technology.

Writing on "The Popotla Wall," another *inSITE* '97 project by the binational collective *Revolución Arte* or "Revolution Art," Melinda Stone offers a convincing account of a community-based art project that successfully reworks and reappropriates a 152-metre cement wall in order to counteract the calculated capital interest of Hollywood. The wall was built around the *Titanic* set for 20th Century Fox and left behind. It was appropriated by the artists as one of the projects and reworked to reflect both the movie maquiladora and the "communal character of the local fishing village" (Stone 1998: 14). Much labour was expended on reworking the wall, but the result made it fit better with the villagers' surroundings—a compensation that cannot be evaluated in strictly economic terms.

Maquiladoras are the locations of flexible production, which in the post-Fordist era relies on three key principles: a premium on knowledge, labour flexibility, and mobility. *inSITE* shares these characteristics with the maquiladora industry. Its brainstorming residencies bear a family resemblance to the command and control centers of the knowledge-producing industry. According to the directors, this knowledge is aimed at generating “unpredictable exchange.” Unpredictable exchange (where *inSITE* departs, but only in part from the maquiladora model) works toward undoing the dichotomy of the intellectual/manual labour divide that characterizes the operations of transnational corporations, which produce knowledge on the developed side of the divide and disseminate labour throughout the developing world. *inSITE* draws its intellectual artistic capital more or less equally from North and Latin America.

But *inSITE*'s departure is only partial, however, because intellectual production, even if disseminated across the border, is nevertheless in the hands of the people—curators, artists, and critics—with institutional capital whose work takes them through an archipelago of centres enclaved throughout the developing world even as they presumably seek to engage and empower non-traditional, disadvantaged publics. In other words, once we abandon the outdated model of centre and periphery, we see clearly that power circulates from enclave to enclave regardless of whether they are located in New York, San Diego, or Mexico City, São Paulo, and San José. This arrangement is evidence of a new international division of cultural labour, whereby executives and knowledge producers can hail from anywhere so long as accumulation, in this case cultural capital, flows along transnational networks of power.

In the new economy, whether financial or cultural, the network provides the structure for flexibility required in production, promotion, circulation, distribution, and consumption (Castells 1996). A similar qualification holds for the manual labor side of the equation; those who fuel transnational corporate or cultural institutions with their labor, including *collaboration* with artists, can also be found on either side of the border—poor Mexicans who work in maquiladoras, and poor immigrant Mexicans and their U.S. kin who work in the service industries. The ruse, of course, is that *inSITE* and its kindred art venues may collapse the two kinds of services that now drive the “alternative” art world: those services rendered by the artist, with his or her highly developed intellectual capital, and those rendered by “communities,” whose cultural capital, gauged in measures of marginality, provides relatively uncompensated value-added to art.

The border is at the heart of this tale of two cities, San Diego-Tijuana, for it is the epitome of such capital transfer. Consider the two-decade long history of community-based and activist art projects that deal with the border region. The best known of these are organized by the Chicano-identified Border Arts Workshop, which was formed in 1984. Before *inSITE* got created, the idea of a binational project was brought to fruition in an exhibition called “La Frontera/The

Frontier,” which was proposed to the National Endowment for the Arts and borrowed freely from the text on border art published in the Chicano Border Arts Workshop. This is the reason that the museum officials were accused of extracting cultural capital from this margin of the art world, of appropriating, as the Border Arts Workshop people say, “our ideas, our language, our culture, now that it is a fashionable and grantable thing to do.”<sup>4</sup> The struggle over ownership of the border and binationalism left many unhealed wounds, and the directors of *inSITE* who would inherit this hot potato managed to negotiate quite skillfully and wisely in order to avoid the impression that they were capitalizing on the region. On that basis, they brokered the distribution of the cultural capital. The binational partnership with Mexican institutions, established for *inSITE* '94, the second edition, was a major step in spreading the responsibilities and the benefits of the program.<sup>5</sup> The incorporation of community engagement projects in 1997 was also an important step toward inclusivity and a means to temper suspicions. Unfortunately, the fifteen projects (which, as the curator noted, were “unabashedly participatory and process-oriented”) were separated from the “exhibition” projects, suggesting a hierarchy according to which the exhibition projects belonged to a more “artistic” class while the communitarian projects were really about community work (Yard 1998: 170).

It seems that the very attempt to balance local and the international interests, the need for art world recognition, and sponsor satisfaction, and the civic demands of foundations and State Arts Councils, offset the good intentions of the 1997 *inSITE*, lubricating the slide back into hierarchical arrangements. To show that its programs were relevant to non-traditional publics, *inSITE* accommodated an already existing bureaucratic rhetoric whereby “community” functions as a code word for poor, racialized people. As a way of putting the struggle behind them (the hot potato), the directors and curators of *inSITE* decided in the year 2000 to de-emphasize “border art” and instead encourage the mobilization of cultural practices that transform public space and modes of transit in the “transnational metropolis” (Mesquita et al. 2000).

Down playing border art, however, is a veritable impossibility, since many of the artists, particularly those invited from outside the region, become enthralled by the border.<sup>6</sup> Indeed the border can be said to be *inSITE*'s prime natural or cultural resource—Southwest California's own Berlin Wall, as noted cynically by several critics. The comparison with the Berlin Wall is not gratuitous; long a site of daunting conflicts between two geopolitical and cultural world views, and more recently carved up cynically and profitably into brick-a-brack, the Berlin Wall echoes what is taking place at the U.S.-Mexico border. But *inSITE* seeks to transform it and the local social ecology into an opportunity for reflection that goes beyond cultural and economic capital, which of course are also generated in the process. The cover of my book, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era*, is actually a shot of a commemoration done by Alfredo Jaar for the number of



people who died at the border crossing. A large sack was filled with balloons, each representing one of the people who died at the passage point of the border; the sack was sent into the air and then opened. I think it was fortuitous that it took the shape of a goat, as though it miraculously turned into a scapegoat and then, when the sack was opened, the white balloons bled out and we had something like a bleeding scapegoat in the air. Jaar also had a chamber orchestra playing Albinoni's *Adagio*, which was too schmaltzy for my taste at that particular place. But in any case, the border, like the Berlin Wall or the World Trade Center, is one of those sites where intangible values predominate. It is like concentration camps and other places where disaster has struck, where people have been enslaved and oppressed, and that cultural administrators institutionalize as heritage sites for commemoration, ritual, testimony, social healing, and tourist attractions. The border, its steel fence in particular, exerts such a potent magnetic force that is almost impossible for many of the artworks situated there to project energetically enough to break away from its pull. Indeed, extending along the border for miles and leading right into the ocean, the fence is a *de facto* installation that would make Cristo envious. Made from corrugated steel landing strip panels left over from the Gulf War, the fence calls attention to the border for some 40 kilometres, and if that weren't significant enough, it overshoots its limits and plunges into the ocean for another 90 metres.

Among the projects that worked directly with the border, most of which assayed a conceptual punch line or an ironic reversal of its function, is Terry Allen's "Cross The Razor," which consisted of a van equipped with two loud speakers, each facing one side of the border and thereby suggesting that now finally Mexicans and Americans could speak to each other. This was when NAFTA was being put into operation. Helen Escobedo's "By The Night Tide," an installation on the Mexican side of the border, consisted of three wire-mesh sculptures resembling ships armed with coconut-loaded catapults, suggesting a defiant but quixotic counteroffensive against the power of the Goliath next door.

Francis Alÿs's "The Loop" avoided the border altogether. It consisted of a twenty-day trip around the world starting in Tijuana and following a perpendicular route away from the fence, heading 67 degrees southeast, northeast, and south-east again, until meeting the departure point but on the San Diego side. What the audience saw was the documentation from Alÿs's brief stopovers in airports and hotels in tourist must-see cities. According to the 1997 curator Olivier Debrouse, there was a "very political stake" in Alÿs's effort not to cross the border the way the Mexican migrants do, but instead to circumnavigate the whole globe. For Debrouse, Alÿs's politics reside in his self-reflective cynicism. Rather than sympathizing with "the wretched of the earth" by assuming their plight (i.e., crossing the border with them), Alÿs turned his gaze on himself as a relatively privileged artist who can take an around-the-world tour. In this way, he endowed the site with broadly spatial insinuations, particularly cosmopolitan ones not usually associated



with the border or at least elite cosmopolitan ones. Alÿs's allusive project reminds us of the cosmopolitan character of art festivals and biennials. Cosmopolitan artists who are "in the loop," many of whom have participated in *inSITE*, are commodities "packaged" ...for this new, apparently marginal, diplomatic industry called a biennial" (DeBrosie 1998: 58).

Carlos Basualdo picks up on this double-edged attitude toward the commissioning institution; for all practical purposes, *inSITE* footed the bill for Alÿs's all-expenses-paid world tour, foregrounding and thus parodying the contractual aspect of the project.

Alÿs's piece goes against the grain of other *inSITE* artists' attempts to make a common cause with community, with the goal of enhancing education and reducing racial strife, and helping reverse urban plight through cultural tourism, new jobs, reduced crime, and so on. Public art programs have drawn much of their significance from the history and social problems of a given place; racism, class differences, and other social fissures are some of the historical legacies available to the "healing" and "problem-solving" power of community-based art practices, as described by Mary Jane Jacob (1995) in the catalogue to her Chicago project "Culture in Action." But *inSITE* has also had its lighter pieces in which artists, most of them from outside Mexico, attempt to capture the hybridity and kitsch found in Tijuana. Many of them fall into the stereotype of finding the kitsch only in Tijuana, particularly the main drag *Avenida Revolucion*, which is where these commodities are sold to gringos. Many artists will simply insert themselves into an already existing framework, as in the Venezuelan artist Meyer Vaisman's "Donkey Cart," a simulation of the kind of donkey cart you normally see set up for photographs with tourists from the U.S.. What many of the *inSITE* artists also do, more in Tijuana than in San Diego, curiously enough, is to insert themselves into an already existing practice and simulate it. At the Tijuana wax museum, where you see figures that are important to Mexico, the artist will insert a figure that might not have been thought of by the curator. So there is a lot of insertion art. Much of the art also draws on the difference between San Diego and Tijuana, how that difference flows across the border. Consider Allan Sekula's photo installation "The Dead Letter Office." It bears the caption: "The [apartheid] machine [at the intersection of the U.S. and Mexico] is increasingly indifferent to democracy on either side of the line, but not indifferent to culture, to the pouring of oil on troubled waters." (Sekula 1998: 102)

Another feature of *inSITE* is that it evolved toward a practice of fermenting unpredictability. In a sense this was already built into the events, since artists do not simply follow through on curators' mission statements. With the assumption of the artistic directorship by Osvaldo Sánchez, who is the current director, this unpredictability has taken on a more refined character. He sees it as the unforeseen, catalyzing, public experience of what it means to come together as a public. Such

practices are not limited to the artistic arena, which is institutionally bound but can be found in activities usually attributed to other fields—education, community action, urban development, etc. In other words, the extraordinary is not at odds with the ordinary and may in fact ensue from it in the very heuristic that a given practice generates. The heuristic is not something that puts itself at the service of a practice, for example, an artistic method. It is rather a dimension inherent in that work just as the epistemic, the aesthetic, or the ethical are also dimensions of any work. None of these dimensions can be separated out. The heuristic, from this point of view, is the experience of subjective and intersubjective creation and revelation. (Sánchez 2005).

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NOTES

1 I underscore the root “labor” in the word “collaboration” in order to emphasize that two or more parties who undertake a task or contribute to it are doing work. Many tasks are socially constructed in such a way that only some of the parties engaged in the activity are to be remunerated financially. The other *collaborators*, who contribute value-added to the activity, presumably derive a non-material return for their participation. The classic example of this differential distribution of value for labor is “women’s work,” especially their “collaboration” within the family unit, where the satisfaction of motherhood was traditionally considered proper remuneration. Artists’ work often goes unremunerated financially because it is assumed that they derive spiritual or aesthetic value from it. But artists’ *collaborators* derive even less financial remuneration, for they are not perceived as the authors or co-authors of the activity. Financial remuneration is not, of course, the be-all and end-all of cultural activity; in our society, however, it is the form of recognition *par excellence*. The problem is that recognition flows in multiple and contradictory tracks. I shall take up this line of argument below when I examine the organization of inSITE and other similar art programs that rely on the *collaboration* of the “community,” a word that is open to many interpretations but in most instances refers to people of low economic status, usually racialized and confined (by class and race and sometimes gender) to poorly served neighborhoods. It may be ironic, yet nonetheless a fact, that poor communities’ share of compensation for *collaboration* in cultural programs is usually conceived of as some “higher” form of enrichment rather than financial remuneration; this fact is consistent with the social construction of inequality, evident even in do-good programs that seek to “empower” the disadvantaged. Stephan Dillemath, a participant in “Services: Working-Group Discussions,” remarks that when artists reflect on “serving audiences, serving communities: actually, they serve you. Don’t forget it” (Services 1997: 141).

2 Toby Miller proposes using the term “new international division of cultural labor” (NICL) to capture the split in production of cultural commodities across continents, taking as his model the imbrication of transnational industrial production across first, second, and third worlds. Mental and physical labour hail from varying locations, disrupting the mercantilist model whereby raw materials from the third world were transferred to the first for the manufacture of commodities. In the post-Fordist era, culture, like the clothes we wear, may be designed in one country, processed in several other countries, marketed in several locations, and consumed globally. Nation of provenance is increasingly an insignificant notion, although the post-Fordist model retains the basic insight that surplus value accrues to power elites, in this case transnational corporations, despite the disseminated structure of leadership, production, and consumption (Miller 1996).

3 For this and all other *Arte Cidade* projects, consult the website: <http://www.pucsp.br/artecidade/indexe.htm>

4 The words cited are those of Hugh Davies, the museum director, paraphrasing the accusations made by members of the BAW/TAF (Berelowitz 1997: 74).

5 According to Sophia Hernández (1997), the inclusion of Mexican institutions was suggested by the *inSITE* partners at the Centro Cultural de la Raza in San Diego.

6 Vito Acconci’s reaction when he first saw the border fence, as related in Hernández’s *Transitio* (77), is characteristic: “I had never seen anything so striking. When I saw that site, it couldn’t be refused or denied. It was a sign of the most malicious...it functioned as a gesture of malice...I returned to my studio in New York and could not get that image out of my mind.”



The last section of the essay draws on Yúdice’s book *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).