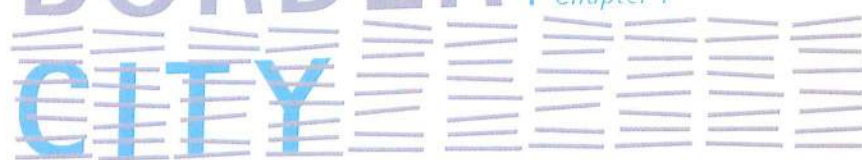
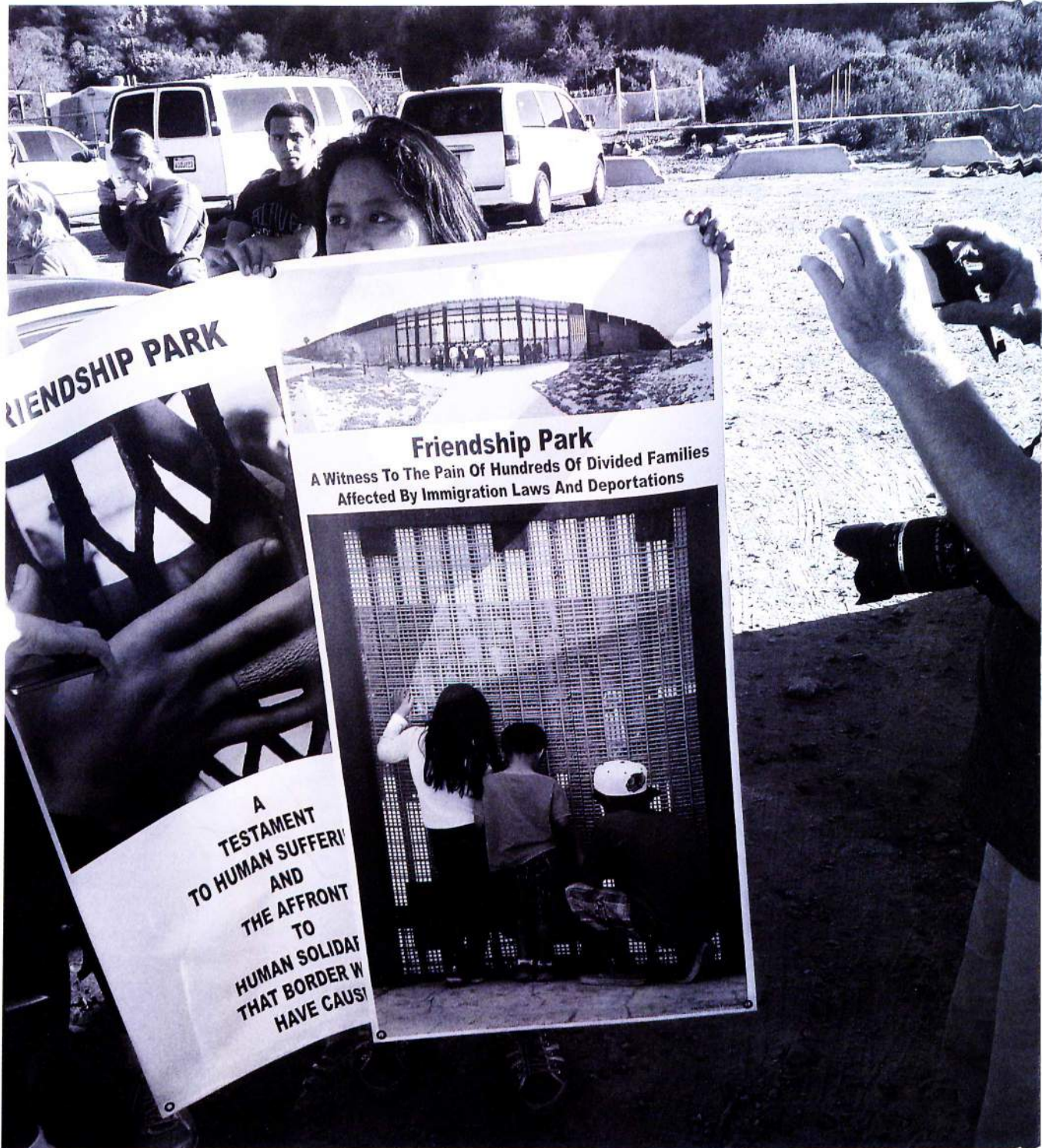


# BORDER | *Chapter 1*

## CITY



Documentation of an interdisciplinary project in San Diego (US)  
and Tijuana (Mexico) by the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar  
and the University of California, San Diego  
[Public Art, Environmental Engineering and Urbanism]



Photograph by Prof. Frank Eckardt.

**RIENDSHIP PARK**



**Friendship Park**  
A Witness To The Pain Of Hundreds Of Divided Families  
Affected By Immigration Laws And Deportations



**A  
TESTAMENT  
TO HUMAN SUFFERING  
AND  
THE AFFRONT  
TO  
HUMAN SOLIDARITY  
THAT BORDER WALLS  
HAVE CAUSED**

## Reflections on a Bordercity

PROF. DR. FRANK ECKARDT

This documentation is based on contributions from a variety of people with substantially different biographies. During the excursion to San Diego and Tijuana, we gathered scholars from many disciplines and cultures. From my point of view, this diversity of viewpoints is exactly the composition needed to find the most appropriate and sophisticated manner to understand the logic of urban development. It is apparent to me that contemporary cities can only be understood if we have a holistic view that includes all spheres of human existence in cities. As a main starting point, I would always insist on the very basic insight that the city is not just an addition of houses, not just a number of inhabitants, not just the sum of connected lines and tubes, and so on.

Looking at the idea of the city from the perspective of San Diego and Tijuana, it immediately came to mind that this area is a reflection of the ocean in front of it: The Pacific Ocean cannot be explained by summing up its drops; San Diego-Tijuana is neither a map, nor a film, neither a property nor a planning area, neither a water network nor a transport system. It is irritating and confusing, but consequently thought through: there is no way to deny – it is more.

This 'more' keeps me busy in my work all the time. While my basis of work is the perception, interpretation and production of space from the ordinary life of people, I have to consider that these 'bottom-up' activities are merging into a larger picture. This picture we once simply called the 'city'. This terminology has guided our work and has been powerful in our way of planning urban life so far. It is a very strong concept as it allows the drawing of lines in planning activities and responsibilities. In a more profound analysis, the 'city' is a construct of modern thinking that tries to improve the life conditions of the general public by controlling spatial processes. History so far has shown that the impact of modern planning can be told as a success story. Efficiency and an approach that refuses ideolo-

gical and interest based particularities are still the major factors for its attractiveness.

However, too many aspects are challenging the uncritical continuation of this approach. Besides the major criticism of its neglect of the subconsciously normative position of modern planning which models life on a 19th century middle class idea of society where the male dominated family is the nucleus of society, the question of the scale and scope of its spatial dimension has become most critical. In this regard, the discussion on what a city is has revealed the weakness of its very basic assumption that a city can be defined in an 'objective' manner. This critique became stronger when scholars pointed at the importance of non-present actors and external factors that have a significant impact on urban life. Simply looking at the visible and present factors is an artificial act that excludes the interwoven relationships with the external world. In urban studies therefore, the perspective of a 'human ecology' which tries to understand urban phenomena by looking at the direct environment has been challenged by the increasingly important global flows of goods, services, natural streams like water or air, persons, ideas, images and information. In this regard, the attention in urban studies has shifted to (global) networks in contrast to local place.

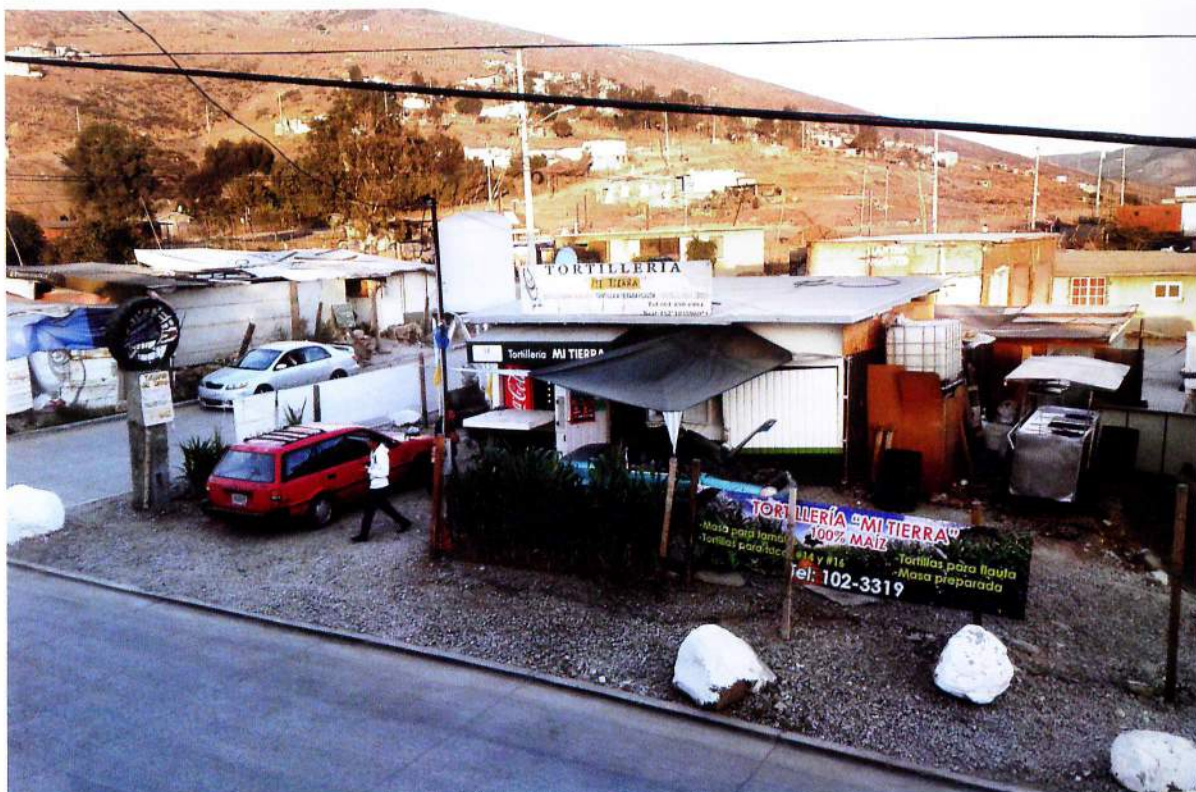
In this academic dispute, a 'one time for ever' answer is not sought. As always in academia, a new scientific paradigm wins ground by calling to attention an aspect of life, which the scientific community has so far not taken into account (or perhaps even previously believed to be necessary). A new paradigm is always stronger if it has an explanatory benefit, and in urban studies is mostly one based on an emblematic city. In this regard, Chicago has often been seen as the paradigmatic city to give evidence for the explanation of the modern city. Los Angeles then became the case study for a new phase of urban development in the late 20th century.

While in driving distance, the area of San Diego-Tijuana puts the question in another light; what will be the basic logic of spatial development in the future? Many of the aspects that support the idea of the networking city are obvious here, but are also irritatingly contradicted by the US-Mexican border. For us, it was therefore highly informative to have our own impression of this space and to have the chance to discuss our observations with UCSD Professors Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman as experts in this area.

When we arrived in San Diego-Tijuana, we had prepared by reflecting on the available literature. This helped us to avoid the failure of trying explain everything by only taking into account what one personally sees and to just spontaneously reflect. Acknowledgement of the knowledge of others allows us to internally discuss our own perceptions. This is a methodological approach, which artists and architects mostly do not follow as they believe in their sense of place. As a social scientist, I have a deep mistrust in relying only on my own perceptions as I fear my own biases. Still, I would argue that the scholarly approach is the better way to go if you want to understand a place and the people there. In art and architecture, explanation and understanding is not the final goal and therefore a level of subjectivity is predominant from the beginning in order to produce a subjective expression at the end. At least, that is my understanding of the artistic process as an outsider.

In the methodological approach, our visit to San Diego-Tijuana therefore had another meaning. These kinds of trips only make sense, if you have learned to filter out your personal perspectives and biases before entering the place. This is why the seminar we conducted in advance was so important. Diverse viewpoints should be anticipated before arrival, not in order to prefabricate perceptions but on the contrary, to allow the observer to discuss different and – in this case contrasting – interpretations of San Diego-Tijuana.

So, what was I discussing with myself – as I was sitting in that bus seat in Tijuana, watching my esteemed colleagues climbing through sewage lines, watching students photographing their surroundings, and getting a glimpse of an enthusiastic Teddy Cruz at the best burrito shop? I have to say, so many things. Yet, I am far from having a clue which of my many impressions I should present here. However, I have to admit that my inner companions were the authors of the anthology *Tijuana Dreaming : Life and Art at the Global Border* [→Kun, Chambers and Montezemolo, 2012 ], who particularly point at the power differences between the two sides of *La Frontera*. Instead of emphasizing networks, physical and cultural violence is discussed by these authors, which they see as proceeding from this border. The architecture of this wall is the expression of an architecture of power. Social inclusion and exclusion mechanisms are spatialized in cement, barbed wire and border controls. In this way, individual and social identities, memories, life stories, feelings of belonging and societal positions are conformed or devalued. For the artists and authors of *Tijuana Dreaming*, their book therefore has the aim to address the unfairness of the border, its impermeability and aggression against Mexico and Tijuana. Their art actions – such as the activities of Alfredo Jaar in 2000 that included poetry, balloons and a common silence on both sides – are meant to raise awareness of the victims of the border. If we temporarily put our perceptions of belonging to different social groups aside, these critiques of the dominant narrative can help us to connect to different levels and scopes of society, that is micro: my individual view; meso: the institutional architecture of a border and its control system; macro: the structures of global society. Although much critical literature is available about the impact on individuals by the limitations embodied by such, the macro reality of the border is rarely addressed as a separate world, representing the ongoing undeclared war against the world's poor. »



Photograph by Prof. Frank Eckardt.



Photograph by Prof. Frank Eckardt.

Also in any critical study of the 'border conditions', a disciplinary study of the border situation needs to be rejected. Otherwise, the potential trouble emanating from the border becomes illusionary and domesticated, subject to a fragmented worldview; thus reconfirming the hegemonic powers, and subaltern and subversive perspectives on the border would be lost. Culture and arts also have to change the way they deal with this particular reality and must be challenged to see themselves no longer merely producers or translators of ideas. In a holistic approach to the border, poetry, sound, vision, literature, visual art and music could be experienced as an expression of resistance against the homogenizing power of the border as an unquestioned narrative which reconstructs again and again the irreducible heterogeneity of multiple modernities.

It appears to me therefore most important to understand that the power of the border is causing a homogenized storytelling about 'We' and 'They' (US-Mexican, Rich-Poor, English-Spanish etc.), but the reality of the border requires narratives deriving from a hybridizing modernity with many different voices and lives to be lived:

*"Daily textures, the issues of both politics and poetics, the criss-crossing of global capital, crime and the corruption of power, not only draw Tijuana close to Los Angeles, London and Tokyo, but transform its presumed 'border' condition into an unsuspected critical space that casts its own particular light into the heart of modernity itself."*

[→ a.a.O, p. xiii]

The issue of cross-linking does not lead to a naïve cosmopolitan perspective, which includes such things as regionalization, but to integration into the global networks that are not seen here as primarily cultural but rather political, criminal, and economical connections. Today, the free flowing reality of these connec-

tions stands in contrast to, but does not contradict the border as expression of a constructed centrality, which inevitably produces peripherals and marginalization. "*Whose border is it?*" is therefore the key question. Tijuana shows only that the world is still a multiplication of frontier zones, which are implemented through legislation, surveillance technologies, bureaucracies and complicated, untold stories and cultures embodied by migrants and their culture. The limitations of the border are a part of it and at the same time the best expression of a global bio-politics, which produces a suppression of those undefined slums in Tijuana and elsewhere that cannot be recognized or even named accordingly in the predominant discourse about 'cities'. Tijuana is therefore also not a 'Post-Border City' because it is as global as every other place elsewhere. La Frontera is a macro-structural border region, but in its social fragmentation and fluidity it is constructed with the global design of multiple limitations and this brings Tijuana closer to Rio de Janeiro, Lagos and Cairo as to San Diego. In this context, culture has its own sphere, which cannot be simply interpreted as the product of power relations. Rather, it exists in arts, literature, visibility and performance in its own dimension. With the cultural and everyday life practices and processes, the different fragments of what was formally known as 'city' can be transformed, so as to lay a puzzle intending to achieve a more complex perception of the social, political and historical. The authors strongly emphasize seeing language in particular as the place for an independent potentiality, which can liberate art from the local standards for aesthetic and from being only used as décor for the rationale of efficiency.

In the introduction to *Tijuana Dreaming* the editors appreciate that the debate on the 'Post-Border City' shows how San Diego and Tijuana are connected to each other. Nevertheless, there is also a danger that the border has become a 'fashion' like other prominent examples dealing with 'extreme situations'.

Rightly emphasized in this 'Post Border Discourse' is the importance of transnational processes between San Diego and Tijuana. Also this means the necessary recognition of Northern Mexico in the development of Southern California. The linkages in the fields of trade, culture and ideas produce this transnationalization. However, the starting point of the authors of *Tijuana Dreaming* remains the inequality between San Diego and Tijuana. For them, the perspective of Tijuana on the border and its relationship to San Diego, Southern California and the United States as a whole is crucial. San Diego produces more than ten times the gross national product of Tijuana.

*"Viewed from Los Angeles or San Diego, the Tijuana-San Ysidro border may be a zone of free trade and free-flowing traffic with edges economic ripe for investment and planning, but viewed from Tijuana it is first and foremost a barrier and partition between core and periphery, a surveilled zone of Homeland Security policing and economic unevenness."* | → *ibid*, p.12 |

The border area is therefore not part of a 'border condition', but a 'mobilities-enclosures continuum'. The focus on the fluidity, hybridity and deterritorialization of the border is potentially a romanticizing view, which does not coincide with ethnographic research | → *cited Lugo, 2008* | which shows the brutality and violence of the border. The prospect of Tijuana is therefore first of all guided by the question of how the globalization of the city is locally noticeable. This is more important for the 'city' than rather vague concepts of cultural flows due to integration into the world market, NAFTA agreements and the maquiladora economy. This is a critique of the fuzzy concept of networking in many contemporary urban studies. For the authors – in line with earlier work of Tito Alegria on the *Transfer Metropolis Tijuana* | → *Metropolis transfronteriza*, 2009 | – the relationship between the fluidity

of the border and its cemented production – is characterized by inequality. Without the growing wage differences between San Diego and Tijuana, there would be no migration nor many imaginary and real attempts to move into Southern California Society. Tijuana's role as a 'theorist's darling' has much to do with the fact that the city since the 1980s has been "*with New York one of the greatest laboratories of postmodernity*" | → *Cancilini, 1990, p.233* |. The criticism of a post border perspective is based on two aspects: Firstly, many of these postmodern perspectives seem to have originated in a context of artistic productions, on the other hand the research subject 'Tijuana' (and vice versa: San Diego) has no longer an independent significance outside the networked space.

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